Dedicated to
My
Parents
Late Tara Devi
&
Late Sita Ram Sharan

"SCHEDULED CASTES IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN INDIA"

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INTRODUCTION

The present work seeks to provide an account of political and social awakening of Depressed Classes in Eastern India form 1917 to 1947 Their leaders' contribution to the freedom movement has been enumerated Although the freedom struggle and Depressed Classes' movement are the popular subjects of research in modern times, the present work is a study of Eastern Indian Scheduled Castes contributions to the freedom struggle, a new look on the matter *It is also a study of the participation of grass-*roots, so called Depressed class people, in the freedom movement in Eastern India

The year 1917 was a turning point in the history of the Congress because of Gandhiji's participation and the party's first time resolve for social upliftment of Depressed Classes At this point it would be quite relevant to recall that the consciousness of Depressed Classes has been gaining momentum from the time of Mahatma Phule It had already acquired some force before 1917 in South India and Maharashtra Dr Ambedkar provided a definite impetus to this consciousness and heightened it to a movement

This work contains seven chapters The first chapter deals *with the causes of the beginning of the freedom movement,* anti imperialist movement, socio religious movements, their impact on national awakening, popular movements and their impact on the freedom struggle Besides, it contains the British agrarian policy, its impact on peasants artisans and grass-roots the main causes of peasants uprising in British India, English education, Expansion of communication, Western ideas and international events which led to people s awakening in modern India Popular *movements have been divided into three parts civil rebellion,* tribal uprisings and peasants resistance

The Second Chapter begins with Depressed Classes' consciousness with 'Satya Sodhaka Samaj of Jotiba Phule and

his struggle against untouchability A new era dawned when Mahatma Gandhi initiated welfare work for Depressed Classes and blessed them with a new name-'Harijan' Dr Ambedkar was the chief personality who was leading Depressed Classes against untouchability and exploitation in Western India

The third chapter incorporates Mahatma Gandhi's first experiment in civil disobedience movement at Champaran in Bihar It is about Mahatma Gandhi and Harijan Movement in Bihar In addition, it includes the contribution of some scheduled caste leaders of Bihar in the Freedom Movement in Eastern India such as J Ram, Jaglal Choudhary, Bhola Paswan Shastri, Dumar Lal Baitha and others

The fourth chapter starts with the masses of Bengal in freedom movement, Depressed Classes movement in Bengal, peasants and grass-roots and their resentment It also touches some Scheduled Caste leaders in Bengal

The fifth chapter takes up the freedom movement in Orissa, Harijan Movement of Mahatma Gandhi, States' people movement in Dhenkanal, Nilgiri, Nayanagar and Talchar – and Praja Mandal Agitation. It also deals with some Scheduled Caste leaders and their contribution to the 1942's Quit India Movement

The sixth chapter presents labourers' and peasants' struggle in Assam, planters versus tea-gardeners struggle and grass-roots people's freedom struggle Some Scheduled Caste leaders and their participation in the ministries before independence has also been mentioned

The conclusion, bibliography and appendix are listed in the seventh chapter

Lastly, it should be noted that many freedom fighters have been included as leaders who followed the voice of their conscience in 1942's Quit India Movement on the call of the Mahatma Gandhi

This work is mainly based on books, personal letters and personal interviews. The Archival sources, papers, journals, census reports, Gazetteers and Government records and reports are other important sources

I owe a special sense of debt to Sri Mungeri Lal, a Scheduled Caste leader and ex minister, and a freedom fighter (presently the President of Freedom Fighters' Organisation

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(D K Sharan)

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

1	R T C	–	Round Table Conference
2	K P P	–	Krishak Praja Party
3	A I C C	–	All India Congress Committee
4	B P C C	–	Bengal Provincial Congress Committee
5	N A	–	National Archives
6	A S A	–	Assam State Archives
7	B S A	–	Bihar State Archives
8	W B S A	–	West Bengal State Archives
9	A L P A	–	Assam Legislative Proceeding Assembly
10	O S A	–	Orissa State Archives
11	D C C	–	District Congress Committee
12	D I R	–	Defence of India Rules
13	O P C C	–	Orissa Provincial Congress Committee
14	C P I	–	Communist Party of India
15	I N T U C	–	Indian National Trade Union Congress
16	T E	–	Tea Estate
17	A I T U C	–	All India Trade Union Congress
18	C P	–	Central Province

1

THE IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE ON THE AGRARIAN SYSTEM AND RISE OF POWERFUL ANTI-IMPERIALIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA

By the middle of the 18th century, the British had established themselves as an imperial power in India Gradually the British spread their imperialistic tentacles through out the length and breadth of India They consolidated their Indian empire The evils of imperialistic exploitation of the conquered people began to appear It had a very wide effect on the Indian scene and by 1885 a strong anti-spread imperialistic movement began to take root in the Indian soil This anti imperialistic movement began to percolate, slowly and gradually, down to the people and ultimately this movement was responsible for the rise of nationalistic feeling in the Indian people The spread of western education in India was responsible for the dissemination of liberal ideas and ideas on liberty and freedom, liberty of speech and freedom of action The imperial Britain, by its very nature stood in the way of the spread of such nationalistic ideas and the British government reacted to the rise of such feelings and dubbed them as anti royalist While this was happening on the political plane, there was an other area in which the impact of the British rule was being too deeply felt This was the agrarian re-arrangement by the imperial government The impact of British rule on India created conditions for the rise and upsurge of a powerful anti-imperialist movement It united the Indian people into a nation The agrarian British policy mostly affected India's agriculture and fate of the farmers It also affected Indian trade and industries "England had broken down the entire

frame-work of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing" [1]

The British introduced two major land revenue and land tenurial systems One was the Zamindari system and the other was the Ryotwari system Under the Zamindari System, old tax paying farmers and revenue collectors as well as Zamindars were turned into private land-lords [2]

As Pt Nehru has observed "The land-lord system was first introduced in Bengal and Bihar, where big land-lords were created under the system known as the permanent settlement" [3]

'Under the Ryotwari System the Government collected the revenue direct from the individual cultivators. In both the systems the peasants suffered a setback. They were forced to pay very high rents and for all practical purposes, they functioned as tenants at the will of the authority concerned They were compelled to pay many illegal dues and were often forced for drudgery (Begar*) Whatever be the name or nature of this revenue system, in effect , the Government seemed to occupy the position of the overall land lord Much later, especially after 1901, revenue rates were gradually reduced, but by then the agrarian economy had been ruined to a deplorable extent and the land lords, money lenders, and merchants had made long and deep in roads into the villages which were of no practical use to peasant cultivators themselves' [4]

The greatest evil that arose out of the British policy regarding Indian agricultural economy, was the high revenue rates demanded and collected in the rigid and tortuous manner Pandit Nehru mentions "The extreme rigour applied to the collection of revenue resulted, especially in Bengal, in the ruin of the old landed gentry and new people from the moneyed and business classes took their place' [5]

The peasant cultivators had often to borrow money from the money lenders to pay their taxes In addition to paying interest incurred, when their crops were harvested, they were invariably forced to sell their produce at cheap and nominal rates The chronic poverty of peasantry usually compelled them to take loan again and again from money lenders, especially in time of calamities like drought, flood and famine [6]

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* Begar—a system under which the peasant had to work without any payment

In course of time money lenders began to occupy a very dominant position in the rural economy resulting into a large-scale transfer of land from the hands of the actual cultivators to the hands of the greedy money lenders resourceful merchants corrupt officials and rich peasants This led to the rise of land lordism as the dominant feature of land relationship all over the country As Jawahar Lal Nehru writes "The Burden of Agricultural debt grew and ownership of the land often passed to money lenders [7] The Impact of British rule thus led to the *exploitative development of a new structure of* agrarian relation which was extremely regressive Gradually new social classes appeared on the scene There arose the land lords the intermediaries and the money lenders at the top and the tenants at will the share-croppers and the agricultural labourers at the bottom in the hierarchy The new pattern was categorically neither capitalism nor feudalism It was a new structure with semifeudal and semi colonial characteristics [8] Unfortunately no effort was made either to improve agriculture or to increase production The poverty stricken peasants did not have the resources to improve agriculture the land lords had no incentive to do so and above all the colonial Government behaved like a typically *selfish land lord The British Government was interested only* in extracting high revenue and not inclined to modernisation of the Indian agriculture [9]

"The result was prolonged stagnation in agricultural production Agricultural statistics are available only for the 20th century and the picture was quite dismal while over all agricultural production per head fell down to 14% between 1901 and 1939 the fall in per capita production of food grains was over 24%" [10]

One adverse cumulative effect of the imperialist exploitation on the peasantry can be summarised The peasant cultivator if he had not fallen in the rank of landless proletariat was brought under the triple burden the claims of Government *for land revenue fell upon all the claims of the landlord of* rent additional to the Government revenue fell on the majority the claims of money lenders for interest fell on the overwhelming majority [11]

IMPACT ON URBAN AND RURAL INDUSTRIES

One of the most important effects of the British rule was a marked decline and destruction of urban and rural handicraft industries India lost not only the foreign market in Asia and Europe, but also its own Indian Market The Indian Market was flooded with cheap, machine-made goods The complete ruin of the indigenous industries, and the absence of other avenues of employment, forced millions of craftsmen to crowd around agriculture Thus, the pressure of population on land multiplied [12]

The village system had been built on the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits The handloom and the spinning wheels were the pivot of the structure of the old Indian society But the British trader brokeup the Indian handloom and destroyed the spinning wheel It deserted the old manufacturing townships driving out their uprooted population to crowd the villages From this there arose the desperate over pressure on agriculture, which has continued in a cumulative scale right upto the present day [13] Nehru elaborates . "In every progressive country, there has been during the past century a shift of population from agriculture to industry, from villages to towns, in India the process was reversed as a result of British policy" [14]

A major consequence of British rule in India was the prevalence of extreme poverty among its people most of whom lived below the margin of subsistence in normal times and died in Lakhs in the ravages of droughts and floods Nearly twenty nine millions people died during famine from 1854 to 1901 [15] In 1770, in Bengal's famine alone, ten million people were estimated to have perished [16]

The poverty of India was neither a product of its geographical conditions nor of the lack of natural resources, nor of some inherent defect in the character and capabilities of its people It was mainly the outcome of the British rule It is interesting to note that the dates of the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and the British conquest of Bengal virtually coincided Britain Subordinated the Indian economy to its own economy and determined the basic social trends in India according to her own domestic needs The result was stagnation of India's agriculture and industries, exploitation of its peasants and workers by the Zamindar, Land lords, Princes, moneylenders, merchants,

capitalists, foreign Government and its officials, and the spread of poverty, disease and semi-starvation.[17]

IMPACT OF MODERN IDEAS AND EDUCATION ON CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FIELD

Modern ideas which first developed in Western Europe made their passage to India along with the British rule Democracy, *sovereignty of the people, rationalism and humanism* were the new found ideas, which helped Indians not only to take a critical look at their own society but also to understand the true nature *of British imperialism in India*

Probably the greatest contribution of British rule to the growth of Indian Nationalism lay in the encouragement which it gave to the dissemination of English education in the country[18] After 1858, educated Indians began to use their recently-acquired modern knowledge to analyse and criticise the exploitative character of the British rule and to organise anti imperialist political movement English education not only enabled Indians to absorb European ideas, it also provided *them with new and powerful means of inter regional solidarity* The system of English education was more or less uniform throughout India, and it imposed a common set of standards and a common *cultural discipline English-educated Indians* in the different provinces thus come to possess a common stock of ideas and aspirations They also had a common medium of *intercourse.*[19]

MARX DESCRIBES THE ENGLISH EDUCATION

"England it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindusthan, was actuated only by the vested interest and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them But that's not the question. The question is, can mankind *fulfill* its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social State of Asia ? It is not, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious *tool of History in bringing about the revolution*"

REFORMS IN INDIAN SOCIETY

Certain efforts were made to modernise Indian Society in order to enable the economic penetration of the country by the

Britisher The Indian caste system and low status of women in the society were the issues which attracted the humanitarian instincts of some British officials like Lord William Bantink and others The Christian Missionaries also contributed much towards the reforms of Indian Society at this stage

SINGLE ADMINISTRATION AND LAW

British rule brought the entire geographical area of the country under a single administration It also unified the country by *introducing a uniform system of law, and the Government* The introducing of uniform method of communication like railways telegraphs, postal system, development of roads and motor transport produced the same unifying effects"[20]

Marx declaration on Indian *Railways*- "The *Railways system* will therefore become in India truly the fore runner of modern Industries Modern Industries resulting from the railway system will dissolve the hereditary division of labour, upon which rests the Indian caste, those decisive impediments of Indian progress and Indian power"[21]

ALL INDIA ECONOMY AND INDUSTRY

The destruction of local economy, self sufficiency and growth of international trade created conditions for the rise of a united Indian economy Modern Industries were all India in their scope, *both the source of raw material and their markets embraced the* entire country Even their labour force was recruited on the wide inter regional basis.

GROWTH OF ALL INDIA INTELLIGENTSIA CLASS

A common pattern of education and a common language as a medium of education and the acquisition of modern ideas by the people *all over the country also gradually gave birth to all India* intelligentsia with a common approach and common outlook

ALL INDIA CAPITALIST AND WORKING CLASSES

Of the two new classes born at this time, one was the capitalist and the other was the working class Both theses classes were of all India character and stood above the traditional division of caste region and religion.

In addition to all this, the very existence of common enemy that oppressed all Indian people bound them together as one In its turn the anti-imperialistic struggle gave a common outlook [22]

DOUBLE MISSIONS DESTRUCTIVE REGENERATING

England, in Marx's view, had a double mission in India One destructive, the other regenerating The annihilation of the old Asiatic Society, and the laying of mental foundation of Western Society in India were the above two mission

The political unity, the native army, the establishment of private property, the building up of educated classes in India regular and rapid communication with Europe through transport, free press and the railway these are the regenerating effects of British Government, which brought consciousness among Indians [23]

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

The reformers and the preachers played a considerable part in awakening the public conscience on the necessity to reform Hindu religion, social customs and taboos They argued against Brahmin pretensions and criticised vulnerable situation with consummate skill 2[4]

It was Lord Buddha who for the first time, in the history of India, proclaimed freedom for Shudras and common man [25]

Early Buddhism believed only in moral and virtuous life unfettered by rituals It proclaimed man's freedom from the shastric injunction It was really a protest against tradition and it sought to provide a rational scheme for the ritual stricken caste ridden man to discover himself [26]

Lord Mahabir also revolted against Brahmanical supremacy and the exaggerated importance of rituals sponsored by priestly classes

The torch of social revolution and emancipation was further carried on by the medieval saints and reformers. Such as Ramanand Tukaram, Chokhamela, Kabir and Nanak and so on Saint Kabir was a social revolutionary who preached for a society based on equality and free from dogma and superstitions The contemporaries of Kabir were Narsing Mehta, Vidyapati, Umapati Nanak and Meera Bai whose Guru was Raidas a man of the depressed class people

who was a Chamar by caste and a friend of Kabir Kabir was in true a great revolutionary, and a social reformer who challenged every thing based on caste, creed and colour[27]

Guru Nanak was also a great social reformer He described the ills of the age in these words.

"The darkness of the age has made demons of men, Sin is the King Greed the Minister, falsehood the mint master and lust is deputy They sit and confer together" [28]

In modern age the social reformers got ideas from Western Europe The Renaissance in Europe almost transformed and regenerated the entire structure of thinking and writing In India, Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) was the first and the best representative of the new spirit of rational enquiry in the basis of religion and society He challenged the current religious beliefs and social practices of the Hindus

"The standard of revolt he thus raised against the medieval tyranny and dogma unleashed forces which created what may be called Modern India and makes him worthy to be ranked by the side of Beacon and Luther" [29]

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a man of versatile ability, profoundly learned in both Indian and European Languages He was above all the social and religious reformer and can justly be regarded as the father of the new generation [30]

Raja Ram Mohan Roy opposed caste system and said- "The distinction of caste introducing innumerable divisions and sub-divisions among them (Hindu) has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling We have been subjected to such insult for about nine centuries and the cause of degradation has been our division in to caste which have been the source of want of unity among us "[31] But Ram Mohan Roy was a social reformer, not a revolutionary[32]

The Brahmo Samaj inspired similar and paralleled movements in the other parts of India The most important of these is the Arya Samaj It was founded by Dayanand Sarswati (1824-1883 A D) in Bombay in 1875 Arya Samaj developed a new national consciousness in the Modern Hindu Samaj "This was really the beginning of that religious and social revival among the Hindus of India to which we owe so largely the birth of our present national consciousness" [33]

Swami Dayanand declared that untouchability was alien to Vedic culture and his organisation gave thousands of untouchables Yagyopavit (thread) and elevated them to a position of respect and dignity in the society[34]

Both the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj were reformist in character. All these brought about a strong reaction which gathered momentum in the fourth quarter of the 19th century. As a matter of fact India was then witnessing a many-sided renaissance Indian languages were being enriched by novelists like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and poets like Rabindra Nath Tagore, boundaries of knowledge were being expanded by the researchers of people and their heritage like Tilak and Bhandarkar There was revival of Indian music, ancient learning and culture, and above all, there was a strong sense of pride and glory in the achievements of their Fore fathers, especially in the spheres of philosophy and religion This created revolutionary feelings against things Western – against Western dress, western education and thought and western ways of living It gave rise to love of things Indian and Indian method of living and thought in the country[35]

Ram Krishna Paramhansa was one of the greatest saints and his discipline Swami Vivekanand gave a contemporary interpretation of Vedanta According to Swami Vivekanand– "Ram Krishna Paramhansa was the holy Ganga of Hinduism"[36]

"Swami Vivekanand was the first to speak openly and courageously against day-dreaming about the glories of past He wanted the Indian nation to build the future with firmness and vision."[37]

Swami Vivekananda, the *champion* of *Vendanta* and the reviver of Hindu Orthodoxy, was a radical thinker, who did not hesitate to denounce Hindu social institution He proclaimed before an astonished world that caste had nothing to do with Hinduism. He said that beginning from Buddha to Ram Mohan Roy – Every one made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious institution caste is simply crystallised social institution which, after doing its service, is now filling the atmosphere of India with stink

This inspiration went a long way to mould the spiritual, social and political movement of this country[38]

Mahadeo Govind Ranade (1842–1901) was a great social reformer, who started social reform movement with a great zeal and devotion His discipline Gopal Krishna Gokhale writes about Ranade – "Ranade had represented for nearly thirty years the highest thoughts and ambitions of India" [39]

Agarakar and Tilak were also social reformers and freedom fighters Agarakar fought against chaturvarna, inequalities and superstitious belief As early as 1880 he wrote, – "The Priests are very unholy because they repeat things without understanding their meaning The Pundits are worse than the Priest, because *they are more ignorant*[40]

MAHATMA JOTIBA PHULE

Jotirao Govindrao Phule was born in an obscure lower caste family He pioneered the attack on the religious authority of *Brahmins and their predominance in the institutions of British* Government and Administration He was born in Pune in Maharashtra in 1827 His initiative set forth a very active movement of Lower Castes, which was to have a profound effect upon the growth of the political organisation in the Bombay Presidency, and in the shaping of the nationalist movement towards the end of the last century[41]

Dr B R Ambedkar *in his book 'Who Were the Sudras' wrote about Phule "The greatest sudra of Modern India, who made* the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes and who preached the gospel for Indian Social Democracy that was more vital than Independence from foreign rule' Jotiba Phule was the first leader, social reformer and teacher of the suppressed people in Modern India He built up a powerful movement for the depressed classes at the end of the 19th century Phule was not a highly educated person He lived and talked in the language of masses. He said – "Untouchability is a blot on *Hinduism and, unless that is abolished, Hinduism can not be a* true religion in the stricter sense *of the term"* [42] Jotiba Phule was a great symbol of revolt He wrote 'Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak and Gulamgiri' He established "Satya Sodhak Samaj' on 24th September, 1873 He wrote in the report of Satya Sodhak Samaj– "To liberalise the law born from the thralldom of the sacerdotal authority and make the depressed classes conscious of

their right by educating them, the Satya Sodhak Samaj was founded on 24th September 1873"

In November 1855 the Government established a school for the depressed classes at Ahmad Nagar. The pioneering work was done by Phule in 1848.

After awakening self respect among the down-trodden, he infused courage in them to standup against poverty and social injustice. He also imbued them with new thoughts, new ideals of human dignity, equality and self-salvation. "Lost rights are not secured without struggle" he said.[43]

The new intellectual and political stirring among the people also led to the rise of the movement for social change. But the most powerful forces for social changes arose when the lower castes and women themselves became conscious of their depressed condition and they began to struggle for the remodeling of society. Men like Jotiba Phule led such a powerful movement.[44]

The social reform movement or socio-religious movement laid the foundation of a new and modern India. It opposed the caste system, slavery, oppression of women and depressed classes. It organised the depressed people against the socio-economic oppression by the upper caste people. In order to mobilise all the people in the struggle against imperialism, the national movement became committed to the goals of abolishing all distinctions and disparities based on caste, sex and religion.

POPULAR MOVEMENT

The Indian people resisted the British Rule from its very beginning. Hardly a year passed till 1857 when some part of the country or other was not convulsed by an armed rebellion. This continuous resistance took three broad forms: civil rebellion, tribal uprising and peasant movement.

The civil rebellion began with the very establishment of the British rule in Bihar and Bengal. Intensification of the land revenue demands, exploitation of the artisan by the East India Company and its servants and uprooting of the old Zamindars created the explosive situation. From 1763 to 1856, more than forty major rebellions occurred in these areas.[45]

The popular movement occurred in almost every district and

province The displaced peasants, demobilised soldiers and sanyasis participated in the famous Sanyasi Rebellion from 1763 to 1800

The Sanyasi movement was led by the sanyasi monk and displaced Zamindars The famous novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote – 'Anand Math' on the basis of the sanyasi rebellion After the sanyasi rebellion, Chour uprising occurred It covered five districts of Bengal and Bihar lasting from 1766 to 1772 Then another Chour uprising occurred from 1795 to 1816

The rebellion of Orissa Zamindars prolonged for a period from 1804 to 1817 There were, numerous uprisings in the south and north India in these days They lacked the modern feeling of nationalism. The culmination of the traditional opposition of the British rule came with the 1857 revolt. It was the first great struggle of the Indian people for freedom from British Imperialism [46]

TRIBAL UPRISING

Various tribal uprising took place against the British Colonialism Dr J C. Jha's The Kol Insurrection of Chotanagpur shows how the Kols rebelled against British imperialism The uprising from 1826 to 1837 occurred in Chotanagpur Similarly the Santal rebellion and Rampas revolts occurred The Santals revolted in 1855-56 [47]

The Mundas revolted against the British from 1895 to 1901 under the leadership of Birsa Munda The famous ulgulan occurred in Chotanagpur, specially in Kolhan [48] In Singhbhum the Raja of Porahat Arjun Singh rebelled against the Britishers in 1857, with the help of Laraka Hos (Tribal people of Kolhan 'Ho Tribe) [49] Oraons of Ranchi and Chotanagpur, Santals of Myurbhanj also revolted against Britishers The Oraons revolted in 1915-16 and the Santals of Myurbhanj revolted in 1917 [50]

The domain of insurgence was considered to be as large as home-land of the tribes themselves [51]

PEASANT MOVEMENT

Two types of peasant movement started, one type of movement was led by the Zamindars and petty chieftains the other set of peasant revolts took on a religious colour This

movement was encouraged by religious and social reforms. They also attacked the new Zamindars land lords and money lenders. In the end they clashed with British Imperialism The Wahabi movement at one stage embraced Bengal Bihar Punjab and Madras The Farizi movement of Bengal and Kukka movement of the Punjab were good examples of peasant uprising with religious colouring[52]

The peasants fought directly for peasant demand against the land lords and the British Government[53]

Indigo agitation was one of the greatest movements of modern India Famous Bengali writer Dinbandhu Mitra vividly portrayed the oppression of the peasantry – Dinbandhu Mitra s Nil Darpan published in 1860 was the first significant protest in Bengali literature against the oppression of the peasantry It was directed against the European planters only[54]

The Indigo peasants of Bihar revolted on a large scale in Darbhanga and Champaran in 1866-68[55] Similarly the peasants of Jessore in Bengal revolted in 1883 and 1889 90

A major agrarian out break occurred in Poona and Ahmad Nagar districts of Maharashtra in 1876 The Mopla peasants of Malabar organised 22 rebellions from 1836 to 1854 There are so many peasant revolts that occurred in the 19th century The national leadership promoted two principles first the nation of the peasantry or Kisan as a single group and second make the peasants to fell as part of the nation[56]

As a result of the British rule in India the socio religious movements and popular revolt added to the political consciousness among Indians Modern education social reform and impact on agriculture owing to the British rule created conditions for the rise of powerful anti imperialistic movement and for unification of the people into a nation[57]

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS AND ITS EFFECTS ON INDIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT

From the very beginning of the 20th century certain international events had profound repercussions on the political situation in the country Russo Japanese war Russian revolution of 1905 and 1917 the Pan Islamism and the First World War influenced the growth of nationalism between 1900 1924 Nehru

acknowledged in his autobiography when he wrote- "Japanese Victories stirred up my enthusiasm and I waited eagerly for fresh news daily I invested in a large number of books on Japan and tried to read some of them" Further, he wrote - "Nationalistic ideas filled my mind I mused on Indian Freedom and Asiatic freedom from the thralldom of Europe I dreamt of brave deeds, of how sword in hand I would fight for India and help in freeing her" [58]

Aurobindo made a reference to Japan, while advocating the cult of strength, and said- "There is no instance in history of a more marvelous and sudden uprising of strength in a nation than modern Japan, India can not perish, our race can not become extinct because among all divisions of mankind it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, most essential to the future of human race" [59]

The Japanese also started taking interest in Indian politics They inspired the Indians to overcome the imperialism. An article appeared in a Japanese paper, the heading was the decline and fall of the British empire, asking England to have lesson from the event of 1905 and be prepared for the downfall of British empire in India [60]

The outcome of the war aroused the patriotism of Indian revolutionaries so much that for the first time bomb made its appearance in Indian politics [61]

In contemporary Government records it is mentioned that the youth of Bengal established a secret force (National Volunteer Corps), and it was the direct out come of the Russo-Japanese War [62]

To preach the gospel of revolution, the leaders of Bengal published many books and periodicals, such as 'Bhawani Mandir', 'Jugantar', 'Mukti Kon Pathe and the like and a revolutionary propaganda was carried on by all of them. Advocating the method of Japan, Bhawani Mandir said- 'Indian must acquire mental, physical and spiritual strength" [63]

In 1909 in the Alipore Bomb case the police confessed that they found in the possession of the prisoners a number of manuscripts on the Russo-Japanese War It was also revealed that a work entitled "The Awakening of Japan" was very much popular among the revolutionaries.[64]

Organised working class movement in India According to a Government record the labour troubles which began in India following the Russian Revolution were a direct form of propaganda[72]

The Indian Trade Union Congress was founded in October 1920 under the leadership of Diwan Chamanlal of Lahore[73]

Its first session was held in Bombay and its second session was held at Jharia (Bihar) on November 30 1921 The president was Joseph Baptista Here the resolution was passed in support of the people of Russia[74]

Russian Revolution also influenced the Indian peasants There was peasant unrest in different parts of the country which manifested itself through three anti zamindar movements such as the Kisan Sabha Movement in Bihar and the United provinces, the Raiyat Association in Bengal and the anti Begar agitation in the Punjab and the Central Provinces[75]

The Congress also showed its concern for the problems of peasants At the Amritsar session of All India Congress in 1919 the class demands of the peasantry were placed for the first time

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2

GROWTH OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN DEPRESSED CLASSES IN INDIA

The Depressed Classes consciousness was aroused with the socio-religious movements of 19th century Mahatma Jotiba Phule was the first social reformer of the suppressed people in Modern India He was himself a depressed class person who started a *movement for the uplift of untouchables*[1] *He exposed the* Brahmins and their fallacies before the people when he was twenty years old and was fired with ideas of liberating the country from foreign rule by reading the life of Shivaji and George Washington He took lessons from Lahujibava Mang, who was later to teach Vasudeu Balvant Phadake V B Phadake was the leader of a revolt which took place in Maharashtra in 1879 against British rule[2]

In 1848 Phule and his student colleagues turned to the reform of traditional Hindu society It was the most important single issue for the society concerned He opened a school for girls of the low and untouchable castes and took responsibility of teaching himself[3]

The Dnyan Prakash, a News paper dated 12 March, 1860 reported the marriage of a widower and a widow Phule had supported the move

Phule established Satya Sodhak Samaj to recognize sudra as a new moral community, independent of Brahmanic Hinduism[4] He wrote in his report of Satya Sodhak Samaj– "To liberate the low- *Born from the thraldom of the Sacerdotal* authority and make the Depressed Classes conscious of their rights, by educating them, the Satya Sodhak Samaj was founded on 29th September, 1873[5]

In 1897, M K Ranga Rao started a school in Mangalore for

the free education of the children of Depressed Classes In 1898 the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay started a Depressed Class mission and the social conference adopted a resolution on the subject In 1906 V R Shinde launched the Depressed Class Mission society of India in Bombay as an independent association ChandraVarkar was the president of the society The Depressed Classes Mission Society was established in 1909 The All India Depressed Classes Federation and All India Depressed Classes Associations were the two chief organisations of this community before 1915 [6]

Ranade, Agarkar, Ram Mohan Roy, Keshav Chandra Sen, Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekanand showed the light of consciousness to the depressed people [7]

On November 20, 1916, some thirty non Brahmin leaders including Dr Nair and Tyagh Raja Chetti met at the Victoria public Hall in Madras City This meeting can be considered as the real beginning of the Non-Brahmin movement

In 1915, Mahatma Gandhi, travelling in South India, delivered a sensational speech at Mayavaran– "In so far I have been able to study Hinduism outside India, I have felt that it is no part of Hinduism to have in its fold a man or people whom I would call untouchables' [8]

Now, who were the untouchables ? In the caste report of 1910 entire Hindu population was divided under three categories

(1) Hindu (2) Animist and Tribal and

(3) Depressed Class

It was further explained that Depressed castes are the castes, contact with whom entrails impurification on the part of a caste Hindu [9]

The depressed class or scheduled caste or Harijan or Achhut are the nomenclature of the scheduled castes as Dr Ambedakar wrote-

All the names have been used officially and unofficially at times or other for the untouchables The term under the Government of India Act is 'Scheduled Caste' but that came in to use after 1935, before that they were called Harijan by Mr Gandhi and Depressed Classes by the Government of India [10]

Mahatma Gandhi also wrote in his book about Depressed

Classes– "The untouchables, to me, 'compared to us, really a Harijan, – a man of God and we are Durjan (men of evil) [11]

Before Gandhian era Depressed Classe's struggle may be called as anti-feudal struggles such as the Kisan movement, the non-Brahmin anti caste movements and the Dalit and agricultural labour movement [12]

Anti caste movements, in particular, the broad non-Brahmin Movement of South India were also generally anti-feudal Non-Brahmin movement could emerge as an alliance of Sudras and anti-sudras against the high castes [13] For the large section of peasant and artisan masses their oppression was interim of caste as well as class They wanted radical changes to the system itself [14]

The toilers as well as many educated section began to reject their hitherto accepted position as sudras within an established Varna and began to see themselves as non-brahmin and non-Aryan or as Bahujan Samaj fighting an exploiting Aryan elite or Sethji-Bhatiji class, which had organised the caste system as a means of segregating and dividing them The Satya Sodhak Samaj in Maharashtra and self respect movement in Tamil Nadu at times took the place of the Kisan Sabha in these areas and engaged it times in direct attack on money-lenders and land-lord In North, anti caste movement took place under the guidance of Arya Samaj and Kisan Sabha [15]

At the same time, the untouchable labourers inspired by such struggles, but only partially included in them, began to organise separately The movement based on their notion of themselves as the original sons of the soil began to emerge in the year 1920 [16]

The Adi Andra, the Adi Hindu and the Adi Dharma were their organisations, which were launched in 1920 A new term for untouchables expressing their socio-economic exploitation 'Dalit' began to be used in North India and Maharashtra in 1930 [17]

From the very beginning of reign of British crown a new approach had developed Queen Victoria's proclamation in 1858 on the eligibility of all India subjects to jobs on the basis of individual merit and not according to birth and caste, disabilities removal Act of 1850,[18] similar acts and regulations were passed in 1861 and 1892, but these acts did not bring any substantial relief whatsoever to the Depressed Classes They were totally ignored [19]

Adi-Drabida The Madras Adi-Drabida Gansangh, representing 60,00,000 aborigines, made a vigorous protest against the caste Hindus There was also a strong representation from the organisation from Bengal Sir N G Chandravarkar interviewed Montagu on behalf of the Depressed class mission, Bombay[22]

A letter, No 3668 C dated 31st October, 1917 by Pherson I C S Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, addressed to the Secretary, Government of India, Home Department, describes the pitiable lot of the depressed classes [23]

The Franchise Committee – 1918-1919 or the South Borough Committee report on Depressed Classes recommended nominations for the representatives f the Depressed Classes. The committee recommended for each provincial council the nomination from Depressed Classes in the following manner :-

Madras	—	2
Bombay	—	1
Bengal	—	1
United Province	—	1
Bihar & Orissa	—	1
Central Province and Berar	—	1
Assam	—	Nil
Punjab	—	Nil[24]

This Franchise Committee 1918 19, was constituted of the following members. The Right Hon'ble Lord South-Borough (President) Sir Frank G Sly Sahib Zada Aftab Ahmad Khan Mr W H Haily the Hon ble Babu Surendra Nath Banerjee the Hon'ble Mr Malcon N Hogg The Hon'ble Mr Sri Niwas and Mr P C. Tallent were Secretary They examined in the course of their tour in the country innumerable witnesses

In a minute to the first despatch on Indian constitutional reforms 5 March 1919 from Government of India to the Right Hon'ble Edwin Montagu His Majesty's secretary of state for India Sir Sarkaran Nair said–

"The non Brahmins and the Depressed classes have awakened to a sense of their political helplessness and to their wretched condition and no longer content to rely upon the Government

which has left them in this condition for the past hundred years, claims a powerful voice, in the determination of their future It is enough to say that they wanted half the members of the executive councils, without the checks provided by the Grand Committee and State Councils, their interest being adequately demanded for a large measure of reforms varying from Home Rule to the demands of the depressed classes as stated above have now become general [25]

Sir Sankar Nair was a member of this committee (Franchise Committee 1918-19)

The Act of 1919, recognised for the first time the existence of the depressed classes in history of India Among the 14th official members nominated by the Governor General to the Centre Legislative Assembly, one was the representative of the Depressed Classes. In the provincial legislature, the depressed classes were represented by four nominations in the Central Province, two in Bombay, two in Bihar and one each in Bengal and United Provinces In Madras ten members were represented from Depressed Classes.[26]

In 1917, the Congress passed a resolution urging the people of India to remove all disabilities that were imposed by custom upon Depressed Classes [27]

Dr Ambedkar wrote in his book that in the annual session of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta in the year 1917, a strange event took place In that session Congress passed the following resolution, the Congress urges upon the people of India the necessity of justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon the Depressed Classes, the disabilities being of the most vexations and oppressive character subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience [28]

After the birth of the congress in 1885, it was felt by the leaders of the movements that the Congress should be entirely a political body, but side by side, they felt that a separate organisation should be organised for solving the social questions So a new organisation started functioning for consideration of subjects, relating to Indian social economy It was called, "Indian National Social Conference" Madras had the honour of being the birth place of the conference First Indian National Social Conference was held in Madras in December, 1887 Raja

Sir T. Madhav Rao, the Primer Indian Statesman of his time was the president of the first conference [29]

Before 1895, there were two schools among the Congressmen on the issue of social reforms versus political reforms One school s view was that social reforms were a great issue but congress session was not the proper platform for it The other's view was that there was need for social reform and there could not be political reforms without social reforms. In 1895, when Congress met in Poona, it was decided that congress must not entertain any question of social reform, so from 1895 Congress became a purely political body After a long interval, in 1917, Congress again became a political and social reforming body by passing resolution for the benefit of Depressed Classes [30]

After taking the social reforms as its programme, Congress became a political and social platform for the Indian masses as Bipan Chandra observes-

"The task of politicing, activising, and mobilisinig the Indian masses was accepted by the Congress from the beginning but was basically undertaken after 1918 In the Gandhian era, the National Movement deprived its entire force from the militancy and self-sacrificing spirit of the masses Starting out as the activity of the radical nationalist intelligentsia, the national movement, later, succeeded in mobilising the youth, the women, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the urban and rural poor, urban and rural artisans, and a large section of the peasantry and small land lords" [31]

The Nagpur session of Congress, held in December 1920, passed a resolution stating that the removal of untouchability was necessary for the attainment of freedom [32]

Mahatma Gandhi wrote in the issue of young India, dated 19th January, 1921, about the untouchability He described untouchability as a sin At Ahmedabad, on 13th and 14th April, 1921, Gandhiji was presiding over a depressed class conference and observed -

"I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism Untouchability must be extinct in this year If this strongest desire is fulfilled, there is a swaraj" [33]

Mahatma Gandhi declared that untouchability was another hindrance to swaraj Its removal was just as essential for swaraj as the attainment of Hindu Muslim Unity [34]

THE SIMON COMMISSION REPORT - 1927 AND THE DEPRESSED CLASSES

A memorandum was submitted by Dr B R Ambedkar to the Simon Commission to safeguard and protect the Scheduled Castes He was a representative of the Bahiskrit Hitkari Sabha The Bahiskrit Hitkari Sabha was the main organisation of scheduled castes and Depressed Classes He demanded joint electorates with reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes

The Bahiskrit Sabha demanded 22 out of 140 seats in Bombay Legislative Council vehemently opposed the principle of nomination and insisted on the extension of principle of election to the Depressed Classes It said that they needed political education and as ministership was a very important privilege they must find a place in the cabinet[35]

The Madras central Adi Dravida Maharaj Sabha also represented grievance before Simon Commission The Sabha demanded nomination for the Depressed Classes The Bombay Provincial Non Brahmin Party in its memorandum demanded separate electorates and reserved seats for the Depressed Classes[36]

The various Depressed Classes associations and organisations represented before Simon Commission It shows the new awakening and political consciousness in these classes[37]

At Calcutta the joint deputation of Nama Sudras and other Depressed Classes was heard by the Commission Its spokesman M B Mullick represented the condition of depressed classes in Bengal was about two fifth of the total population therefore nineteen millions and entry to the temple was prohibited for them If a high caste Hindu was cooking his food the mere presence of a Depressed Class member there would pollute him and his food They lived in separate places in villages and bad names were given to their village They had no access to the water of the District Board wells but had generally to live on tank water which was dirty The children of the Depressed Classes were given back and separate seats at schools and were badly beaten Even the postmen refused to deliver their letters They had to wait out side to throw the money into the Post Office then post cards and stamps were thrown to them from a distance by the postal clerk[38]

The Madrasi-Adi-Dravida in a manifesto, addressed to Mr John Simon, gave their number to be 80 lakhs and they explained their condition, exactly what was prevailing[39]

Similarly at Lucknow, a deputation from the Depressed Classes put their demands before Simon Commission The representatives were claiming to represent about 1,20,00,000 people in the United Provinces They were voicing the same general complaint of injustice and oppression, illustrated with instances of acute suffering[40]

From Punjab, similar complaints and reports were made[41]

"I would like to quote here how the untouchables all over India awakened to the point of asserting themselves and displaying boldness never shown by them in the history of India"[42]

All India Depressed Classes conference was held in Madras in February, 1929 In its opening session, the president of the conference B C. Mandal said -

"The jugglers talk of equality and fraternity but their sympathies are lip-deep They have been giving bluffs for the last five thousand years The so-called patriots are not ready to give *social right to their own country men My friends, do not depend upon any body, try to raise yourselves have faith in God and in your own selves*"[43]

Dr Ambedkar in a memorandum to the Simon commission demanding joint electorate with reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes demanded 22 out of 140 seats in the Bombay Legislative Classes nomination They needed political education and as ministership was a very important privilege, they must find a place in the cabinet[44]

As regards Depressed Classes, the Nehru Report said "In our suggestion for the constitution, we have not made any special provision for the representative of Depressed Classes in the legislature That could only be done by the way of special electorates or by nomination"[45]

Report of the Indian Central Committee and its recommendation for depressed classes The statutory commission and central committee were complementary to each other

The committee recommended separate electorates for Depressed Classes in Madras

"Although, we are generally opposed to any extension of the vicious system of communal electorates The necessity for advancing the political education of Depressed Classes is so urgent that we recommend that separate electorates should be formed from the castes named in Madras electoral role, referred to above for a period of ten years, after which separate electorates should be abolished and seats should be reserved for them in joint electorate" [46]

In other provinces it was recommended that seats should be reserved for the scheduled castes as defined by the local government in joint electorates The seats recommended for scheduled castes in the various provinces are as follows -

"Bengal-8, Bombay-8, United Provinces-10, Punjab-6, Bihar and Orissa-6, Central Provinces-8, Assam-9

The committee opposed the separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, because it would harm the causes of Depressed Classes.[47]

Sir Harnam Singh, a veteran member of the Central Legislative Assembly, concluded in the report that "the depressed people have developed a class consciousness within the last few years, their representatives met us at every centre and treated us to a long recital of their grievances, many of them social and some of them are such as no wise legislature can afford to ignore" [48]

Rao Bahadur M C Rajah, a representative of the depressed classes, presented a note to the central committee The Depressed Classes in India present definite problem in political and social evolution They are the resultants of historical forces tending to be religious, economic and social in nature Their class consciousness is growing, stimulated partly by the sympathy of Government and partly by the belated awakening of Hindu social conscience [49]

There was a strong report among the Indian Central Committee members for the representation of depressed classes in the legislative But they differed fundamentally on the question Whether they (depressed classes) should be represented by the method of separate electorates or by joint electorates [50]

The Indian Franchise Committee Report pleaded for the representation of depressed classes

Various organisations of Depressed Classes in Madras Bombay, Bengal, United Provinces, Assam, Bihar and Punjab represented their case to the Provincial Franchise Committee

The Government of Bombay therefore recommended that the Depressed Classes should be provided with separate electorates of their own

M B Mullick made representation to the Indian Franchise Committee from Bengal He was an M L C.[51]

The Simon Commission conceded that- "Separate electorates would no doubt, be the safest method of security, the return of an adequate number of persons who enjoy the confidence of the depressed classes They have ignored one important fact The Depressed Classes are not a homogenous body, they consist of a large number of heterogeneous clan, which are socially distinct They entirely lack cohesion and are scattered all over provinces The result will be that the concession proposed by the Simon Commission, instead of being blessed, will be a veritable curse for them" [52]

ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

Before the second R T C was held, Dr B R Ambedkar went to meet Gandhiji on August, 14, 1931 at Mani Bhavan at 2 00 P M Here was the start of the battle between two colossus, what was known in the History of India as the Gandhi – Ambedkar controversy[53]

The second R. T C was a very important and historic event The Congress agreed to participate in the conference The main work of R. T C was to be done in the federal structure committee and the minority committee The conference was to re-examine and amplify the reports prepared by a corresponding committee on the first session of R T C Mahatma Gandhi was a member of both the committees and it was hoped that his policy of conference should be the policy of congress. "But while Mr Gandhi's personality made a deep impression on individuals and on the public out side the conference, his performance inside it was disappointing" [54]

There was truth in Dr Ambedkar's view on the 2nd R T C He wrote -

"Every body was therefore looking forward to the Congress

to lead the conference to success Unfortunately the Congress showed Mr Gandhi as its representative As a unifying force–he was a failure Mr Gandhi presented himself as a man full of humanity But his behaviour at the R T C shows that is the flush of victory Mr Gandhi treated the whole Non congress delegation with contempt He insulted them whenever any occasion furnished him with an excuse by openly telling them that they were no bodies and that he alone as the delegate of the congress represented the country Instead of unifying the Indian delegation Mr Gandhi widened the breach [5]

Further Dr Ambedkar said– "Thus ended the efforts by the minorities communities to bring about a solution of communal problem The discussion in committee threw Gandhi s attitude to the untouchables in reality Everybody felt that Mr Gandhi was the most determined enemy of the untouchables With so much of his energy and attention did Mr Gandhi concentrate on the question of untouchables that it would not be unfair if it was said that the main purpose for which Mr Gandhi came to R T C was to oppose the demand of the untouchables

In a speech in defence of his position in R T C Mr Gandhi said– Muslims and Sikhs are well organised The untouchables are not There is very little political consciousness among them and they are so horribly treated that I want to save them against themselves If they have separate electorates their lives would be miserable in villages which are the strong hold of Hindu orthodoxy It is the superior class of Hindus who have to practice penance for having neglected the untouchables That penance can be done by active social reforms and by making the lot of untouchables more bearable by act of service but not by asking separate electorates for them The only thing needful is to put them on the voter list and provide fundamental rights for them in the constitution" [56]

On August 17 1932 the decision of the Prime Minister on the communal question was announced It was called as "Communal Award" It was the greatest shock for Mahatma Gandhi He was in Yarvada Jail at that time He had not given up his fight He informed the British cabinet from Yarvada Jail that he would resist with his life the separation of the untouchable Hindus from caste Hindus. He declared his resolve to fast un to death if the separate electorates for the Depressed Classes were not abolished

Ambedkar was against this view of the Mahatma "Why did Mr Gandhi not oppose the separate electorates for Sikhs and Muslims and others" ?[57] Mr Gandhi had no word to say against separate electorate being conceded to the Christians, Anglo-Indians, Muslims and Sikhs Although the Congress, as Mahatma Gandhi had claimed, represented 85% of the population of the whole of India It is useful to recall what he said then, 'I would like to repeat what I have said before that while it will always be acceptable to the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, the Congress will not be a party to special reservation or special electorate for any other minorities"[58]

On the 20th September, 1932, Gandhiji commenced his fast un to death as a protest against the grant of separate electorates to the untouchables[59] The whole country was shaken and plunged into anxiety, Sir Rustam Masani replying to those who attributed motive of his fast as political black mail, said *"No one knows the weight of others burden None* at any rate would hazard an estimate of the burden of the man who, at last carries the weight of the vast continent on his feeble shoulders"[60]

Ambedkar says about the situation -

'As to myself, it is not exaggeration to say that no man was placed in a greater and graver dilemma than I was then It was a baffling situation I had to make a choice between two different alternatives There was before me the duty, which I *owed as a part of common humanity to save Gandhi from* sure death There was before me the problem of saving for the untouchables the political right which the Prime Minister had given them I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of Mr Gandhi by agreeing to alter the communal award in a manner satisfactory to Mr Gandhi This agreement is known as the Poona pact"[61]

Dr Ambedkar went to see Mahatma to find a solution The emphasis was laid on saving the life of Mahatma and Dr Ambedkar was subdued to a great extent in this venture Ultimately, a historic agreement known as the Poona pact was reached on 24th Sept 1932 Dr Ambedkar represented on behalf of Depressed Classes Gurudeo Tagore also reached Poona at this time on hearing the news of agreement[62]

MAHATMA GANDHI AND DEPRESSED CLASSES MOVEMENT

Gandhi's entry into active politics in India is generally regarded as having ushered in a new era in the history of the removal of untouchability like many other notions about Gandhi, it is a highly exaggerated statement, although he played a notable part in giving a fillip to the great reform movement for removing untouchability[63]

"I do not want to be reborn", Mahatma Gandhi said- "but if I have to be reborn I shall wish to be born as an untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, suffering, and the affronts levelled up against them in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from their miserable conditions"

In Mahatma Gandhi, we have the unique example of a man who influenced the thoughts, the emotions as well as the action of very large number of people His appeal was to the entire personality, to the heart, the head, and the compulsives which make a man give himself unstintingly[64]

His approach to the problem of scheduled castes was not of a social reformer but that of a humble penitent who identified himself with the oppressed He lived by preference in Harijan colonies even after the advent of freedom of which he was the father showing his intense sense of oneness with them

There are great spheres of national life where the Mahatma s teaching continues to shape national policy The most important of these is the sense of social justice, which he brought in to national life and identified them (depressed people) as 'Harijan s in India Nothing moved him so much as the inhumanity with which Hinduism had treated the Depressed Classes throughout the history[65]

Mahatma Gandhi added a new phase in the Congress attitude towards untouchables- ' Gandhi is unique, says Francis Nelson in his significant book 'The Tragedy of Europe

'There is no other record of a man of his position challenging a great empire A biogenes in action a saint Francis in humanity, a Socrates in wisdom, he revealed to the world the utter pettiness of the methods of the statesman who relies upon force to gain his end [66]

Gandhiji struggled his whole life against evil and injustice within the frame work of Hindu society itself, there was the age-old prejudice against the untouchables He sympathised the children of God whom an unjust social system had deprived of the most elementary human rights Gandhiji wrestled with the problem all his life, but his partymen were so preoccupied with political issue and he too had so many problems on hand that he could not bring about that psychological revolution which was always near his heart [67]

The removal of untouchability was an indispensable part of his constructive programmes In Gujarat and wherever he went and wherever he spoke, he poured ridicule on this 'Leprosy of Hinduism' as he once termed untouchability When he went on the historic crusade for the temple entry at the Vaikom temple in the south, he entered into discussions with the learned masters of Hindu Law and convinced them by his argument that this system had no sanction in any religious book.[68]

But it would be interesting to discuss in this connection the extent to which Gandhi himself was prepared to go in working out this programme of reform He was not in favour of interdining and intermarriage among different caste [69] He did not even always support the idea of untouchables entering the Hindu temples Thus, he said– "How it is possible that the Antyaja (untouchables) should have the right to enter all the existing temples ? As long as the law of caste and Ashram has the chief place in the Hindu religions, to say that every Hindu can enter every temple is a thing that is not possible today" [70]

HIS WORK FOR THEIR EMANCIPATION

Mahatma Gandhi had so many works and problems in hand He was applying his unerring instinct to solve each of the problems According to Mahatma Gandhi, the problem of untouchability could be tackled by revolutionary methods It was a purely social and religious question for him He wanted this evil to go by gradual process and by appeal to the conscience of Hindus [71]

Mahatma Gandhi called untouchability the cancer eating up at the vitals of Hinduism Mahatma Gandhi further says "If I discovered that those scriptures, which are known as the

Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagwatgita, the Smrities, etc clearly showed that they claimed the divine authority for untouchability then nothing on this earth would hold me to Hinduism I should throw it overboard as I throw overboard a rotten apple" So, Mahatma's religion was the religion of freedom and growth Gandhiji said 'If Hindu-Muslim unity was to be established, untouchability in every form must go, and Hindus must be prepared to embrace Muslims as their own blood brothers"[72]

In attempting to eradicate untouchability, Mahatma Gandhi was tugging at roots several thousand years old, untouchability is segregation gone mad theoretically a device against contamination It actually contaminates the country they allow it, Mahatma Gandhi knew this and he fought untouchability for the sake of the castes as well as the out castes, but in fighting it he defied a thousand taboos and rounded a million fears, superstions, hatreds and vested interests Buddhism and many Hindu reformers had attacked untouchability Gandhi said little against it until he had taken action against it[73]

Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi was neither a revolutionary social reformer nor a rebel against the existing Chaturbarna Dharm which prescribes the four divisions of Hindus He had a mind of a politician and statesman but heart of a saint He hated a system based on injustice Addressing a meeting in Godhara (Gujarat) on 2nd January, 1925 he said, 'I had been to three places in the locality of untouchables I saw their animal, and not men If we are not responsible for their pitiable condition, then who else is ? For me, Swarajya is absolutely nothing in comparison to service for these people"[74]

Mahatma Gandhi defended caste system (Varna system) in an article entitled "Why I am a Hindu" He said, "Finally, the discovery of the law of Varnashrama is a magnificent result of the ceaseless search of truth' Even though he defended caste system, he was always against the untouchability He said, "Keenly and deeply as I feel the taint of untouchability and deeply I feel convinced that if this untouchability is not removed with roots and branches from Hinduism, Hinduism is bound to perish"[75]

Jagjivan Ram wrote in his book about Gandhiji s feeling

"Mahatma Gandhi uses Varna and caste as interchangeable terms and believes that all types of men can be categorised under four broad occupations – teaching, defending, wealth producing, manual labour, such is the varna system He wrote "Which we are trying to resurrect ? It is the same Parkington with a map trying to push back the Atlantic ocean" [76]

While Gandhiji elaborated and stressed his conception of caste and varna expecting Hindu conscience to catch up with a new thinking, he considered the eradication of untouchability as a matter of the gravest urgency[77]

Gandhiji organised a country wide movement and went a long way in awakening both the conscience of caste Hindus and the consciousness of Harijans Immediately after 'Poona Pact', he embarked upon an anti-untouchability campaign In 1934, he undertook the great anti untouchability tour In the words of Muriel Laster, "For months we went from place to place He held seven open air meetings in one day After the long speeches there would be a collection, then a long procession of people brought gifts, after taking off their jewellery to offer him, he became an auctioneer, nothing was too significant to have its attention and to fetch its price" [78]

UNTOUCHABILITY NOT A PART OF HINDUISM

Mahatma Gandhi, ushering in all India programme for the uplift of the Depressed Classes, was undisputed master and leader of the All India Congress The cause of freedom was upper most in his mind and the cause of untouchables a second issue So he never wished to embark upon a revolutionary programme for the untouchables because it might result in the cracks in the Congress

But the always abhorred untouchability and said, "I believed that untouchability was not a part of Hinduism, if it was, such Hinduism was not for me True, Hinduism, does not regard untouchability as a sin I do not want to enter into any controversy regarding the interpretation of the Shastras. It might be difficult for me to establish my point by quoting authorities from Bhagwat Gita and Manusmriti But I claim to have understood the spirit of Hinduism that has sinned in giving sanction to untouchability It has degraded us, made us the pariahs of the empire ' [79]

Gandhiji did not plunge deep into social regulation and therefore, reduced its value and importance "In fact, Mahatma's limited programme in this respect has seemed to them to show excessive consideration for the irrational prejudices of caste Hindus".[80]

Mahatma Gandhi always insisted on the theory of persuasion rather than revolution It was undoubtedly a flattering approach to the reactionaries particularly when a great section of the Congress workers organised mass meeting against interlining an untouchability movements by Gandhiji In 1929, the Congress Working Committee appointed a Sub-Committee with Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Seth Jamuna Lal Bajaj With their active works a number of temples were thrown open to untouchables But with Congress drifting towards anti Simon agitation, the work for untouchability was held up" [81]

Dr Ambedkar wrote in his book that the temple entry was a strange game of political acrobatics Dr Ambedkar says,

Mahatma Gandhi behaved as an opponent to temple-entry When the untouchables put forth a demand for political right he changed his position, and became a supporter of temple entry When the Hindus threatened to defeat the Congress in the election, if it pursued the matter to a conclusion, Mahatma Gandhi in order to preserve political power in the hand of Congress gave up temple entry[82]

Dr Ambedkar's view regarding the temple entry was explained "To open or not to open your temple is a question for you to consider and not for me to agitate If you think it is bad manners not to respect the sacredness of human personality open your temple and be a gentleman If you rather be a Hindu than be a gentleman, then shut door and damn yourself for I don't care for you".[83]

HARIJAN SEVAK SANGH AND MAHATMA GANDHI

Gandhiji's organisation Harijan Sevak Sangh was a body of caste Hindus Madan Mohan Malviya was its President, the motto of the sangh was to serve for the cause of the Untouchables Mahatma Gandhi collected funds for the Sangh, about 8 lakhs, 'Mr Gandhi did most of the tour on foot The total amount collected was 8 lakhs' [84]

But Harijan Sevak Sangh became a political organisation later on

"Does it not show that the Harijan Sevak Sangh is a charitable organisation in name and that its real aim is to ensure the untouchables, to make them the camp followers of the Hindus and the Congress Is there any wonder if the untouchables look upon the Harijan Sevak Sangh as an abomination the object of which is to kill them by kindness ? [85]

Dr Ambedkar quoted the incident of Kavitha where Mahatma Gandhi had advised the untouchables of Kavitha

"There is no help like self help God helps those who help themselves If the Harijans concerned will carry out their reported resolve to wipe the dust of Kavitha by their feet, they will not only be happy themselves but they will pave the way for others who may be similarly treated If people migrate in search of employment how much more should they do so in search of self respect ? I hope, that will be the wiser of Harijans if they will help those poor families to vacate inhospitable Kavitha '

Dr Ambedkar observes- "Mr Gandhi advises the untouchables of Kavitha to vacate But why did he not advise Mr Thakkar to prosecute the Hindus of Kavitha and help the untouchables to vindicate their rights that is why the whole programme for the removal of untouchability is just words, words and words and there is no action behind it ?'[86]

Harijan Sevak Sangh failed to make any impact either on the caste Hindus or on the Scheduled Castes [87] But whatever might have been the achievement of Harijan Sevak sangh there is no denying the fact that the most important factor that contributed to the amelioration of the Depressed Classes was the new spirit of the time engendered by the World Wars, the national struggle for freedom and the great economic and other changes that were sweeping the country Modern system of transport, railways, train, buses, trams where all had to sit together, modern industrial factories where orthodox Hindu and Depressed Classe's labourers had to work live and fight (in case of strike) side by side, the great national struggle where all classes and creeds sat together in close physical touch and spelt down to eradicate untouchability both in theory and practice [88]

MAHATMA GANDHI, DR. AMBEDKAR AND THE DEPRESSED CLASSES

Mahatma Gandhi was a politician, leader, statesman, spiritual and religious guide, all rolled in one Though he appeared as a dynamic force, he was not so revolutionary for the majority of his country men, if he had been so, he would have frightened them, instead of inspiring them, repelled them, instead of drawing them His policy was one of unification [89]

After the second R T C the problem of untouchability assumed a world wide concern The Depressed Classes became a force in the Indian Politics Hence, Mahatma Gandhi after the Poona Pact, made concerted and consecutive efforts to win over the untouchables and isolate Dr Ambedkar The latter also accepted the challenge and both the personalities strove hard to tackle the problem *The inhuman institution of untouchability* created a revolt by those who suffered from inequities The conscience of the Hindus was challenged by leaders like Dr B R Ambedkar who put the untouchables on the political and social map of India, while the effort of Mahatma Gandhi weakened the defence of Hindu orthodoxy[90]

Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar both stood against social evils. Both wanted to reform a corrupt society But their line of action was different One was revolutionary and other was evolutionary One wanted to reform the existing institution of Hindu society, the other wanted to create a new order based on the concept of Justice and equality of all men To Dr Ambedkar the institution of untouchability was a sin and was to be destroyed the sooner the better, and therefore the Chatur Varna system must go, and Hindu society must have a platform shorn of all in equalities To Mahatma, it was a religious question He upheld the Chaturvarna Dharma and proposed gradual changes in it so that in the course of time Hindu heart would be changed [91]

Dr Ambedkar had great hatred towards ridiculous social reformers when the said- "Saints and reformers have come and gone but untouchability has remained as it is" Pandit Nehru said- "Dr Ambedkar was mighty symbol of revolt' Dr Ambedkar wanted a complete and revolutionary transformation of Hindu society, Mahatma Gandhi preferred peaceful non violent changes in Hindu society Where Mahatma Gandhi was a spiritual

leader of the downtrodden, Dr Ambedkar was born among them and therefore a grass root leader of the Depressed Classes To Mahatma independence was the first objective, to Dr Ambedkar social democracy was a first requisite to precede political democracy[92]

While Dr Ambedkar stood mostly for oppressed and Depressed Classes, Mahatma Gandhi stood for the whole nation, may be for the humanity of the world Mr R. K Sidhwa ex- M P, addressing a birthday meeting at New Delhi, said, "Truly speaking, Gandhiji was influenced by Ambedkar to do something for the political rights to the untouchables Ambedkar was the liberator of the downtrodden and was a great seer as well'[93]

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MAHATMA GANDHI AND THE CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA

It was in 1917 when Mahatma Gandhi first visited Bihar Dr Rajendra Prasad said– "Bihar emerged as a hopeful young province growing from strength to strength only after Mahatma Gandhi's visit in 1917 To say so, however, is a disparagement of the service of those old stalwarts of the province who had created a consciousness among our people and had succeeded in obtaining recognition of a separate existence of Bihar, both in the administration of country and in the constitution of the Congress"[1]

The beginning of modern political consciousness can be traced out in Bihar from the early Congress days, and some people here were also attracted by the socio cultural movements in the first decade of the twentieth century The establishment of the Boy's Association and the Saraswati Academy was held at Darbhanga in January, 1901 The Bengal partition agitation movement and Swadesi movement were inspired by the Boys' Association and Saraswati Academy The youth in other parts of Bihar were also inspired by the Swadesi movement. The Bihar provincial Congress conference met at Patna early in 1908[2]

But Champaran has been an area of the historic events. After return from South Africa, Gandhiji made, for the first time on the Indian soil, a bold and successful experiment of Satyagraha It was a unique method of social dynamics based on soul force and developed through service and sacrifice[3]

Rajkumar Shukla brought Gandhiji to the farmers of Champaran He met Gandhiji and placed the grievances of the Champaran farmers before him at the time of Lucknow session of the Congress in 1916 Raj Kumar Shukla urged Gandhiji to visit Champaran to witness the condition of the ryots there

Gandhiji promised to tour Champaran Gandhiji started from Calcutta with Shukla on 9th April, 1917 and reached Patna in the next morning "So, early in 1917, we left Calcutta for Champaran, looking just like fellow rushes I did not even know the train He (Raj Kumar Shukla) took me to it, and we travelled together, reaching Patna in the morning This was my first visit to Patna "[4]

The Champaran tenant was bound by law to plant three out of every twenty parts of his land with indigo for his landlords, the system was known as 'Tinkathiya' system, as three Kathas out *of twenty (which make one acre) had to be planted with* indigo [5]

Professor Kriplani, at that time, was in Muzaffarpur He spoke about the desperate condition of Bihar, particularly of the Tirhut division, to Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi decided to do some thing for the indigo downtrodden peasants He said- "The real relief for them is to be free from fear We can not sit still until we have driven tinkathia out of Bihar I had thought that I should be able to leave here in two days, but I now realise that the work might take even two years I am prepared to give that time, if necessary I am now *feeling my ground, but I want your help"* [6]

The Government did not like to probe in the hardship of the down trodden peasants The Magistrate ordered Gandhiji not to enter in the village but Gandhiji saw things for himself despite orders under section 144 He made the following statement before the Magistrate of Champaran– 'I venture to make this statement not in any way in extenuation of the penalty to be awarded against me, but to show that I have disregarded the order served to the highest law of our being, the voice of conscience' on 20th April, 1917, the Magistrate, Mr Hey Cock sent a written message to Gandhiji that the lieutenant Governor had ordered the case against him to be withdrawn This was a moral triumph and Gandhiji continued his great works The country, thus, had its first direct object lesson in civil disobedience [7]

At the invitation of the lieutenant Governor Sir Edward Gait Gandhiji met him at Ranchi in June 1917 The out come was the appointment of an Enquiry Committee to investigate and report on the agrarian conditions in Champaran Mahatma Gandhi was

also a member of the committee The Champaran agrarian Bill was passed on the recommendation of the committee It served to alleviate the long standing and acute miseries of a vast body of men and was moral victory of ryots Mahatma Gandhi's method in Champaran proved a complete success It is the land mark in the history of satyagraha, as also in the history of Bihar as well as of India [8]

The Champaran incident may be regarded as the first stage in the emergence of Gandhiji as a political leader of India Champaran also marked the beginning of his stormy career freedom's battle was won [9]

On 28th August, 1920, the Bihar Provincial Congress passed a resolution supporting Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent and non cooperation movement The mass movement in Bihar took the shape of the five famous boycotts, boycott of elections and legislature, of law courts, of schools, of drugs and of foreign clothes [10]

THE GAYA CONGRESS

The 37th Session of the Congress at Gaya was held in December, 1922 The Congress at Gaya decided for continuance of the boycott of legislature In this Congress, Rajendra Prasad was elected secretary and the office of the A I C C was shifted to Patna The Gaya Congress decided against council entry Each and every delegate from Bihar chose the way shown by Mahatma Gandhi and though they showed full faith in and great regard for Deshbandhu Das and Pandit Moti Lal Nehru [11]

The movement had its effect on the Adivasis as well, the Tanabhagats of Ranchi attended the Gaya Congress. They took no tax and stuck to it at great sacrifice [12]

MAHATMA GANDHI AND THE HARIJAN MOVEMENT IN BIHAR

From 1928-29 there was again a new impulse throughout the country expressing itself in various forms A successful Satyagraha movement and no rent paying campaign had been organised by the peasantry of Bardoli Taluq in Surat District

The Congress at the Calcutta session also passed a resolution of constructive works for the Congressmen such as boycott of

foreign cloth, prohibition of drinks, eradication of social abuses and encouragement to women to take their due share in national upbuilding, removal of untouchability and work among labourers – "It is only by constructive programme that the revival of Non-cooperation is possible", said Mahatma Gandhi and he wanted to make the year following this session of the Congress a year of probation and preparation[13]

Mahatma Gandhi decided to start the Satyagraha by breaking the salt laws after marching to Dandi, a village on the sea-coast, about two hundred miles away from the Sabarmati Asharam On the 12th March, 1930, at 6 30 a m he started on a historic march to Dandi with seventy eighth volunteers hailing from different provinces, including Bihar "The pilgrims from different provinces, including Bihar march onwards on their long trek", expressed Shri Jawahar Lal Nehru After 241 miles of triumphant march with unabated zeal and energy, Mahatma Gandhi reached Dandi on the 5th April, 1930

In Bihar Champaran and Saran were first in the field to start salt satyagraha After that all the districts of Bihar observed the salt satyagraha movement[14]

Mahatma Gandhi's decision to "fast unto death" on the question of communal award, plunged the country in a state of suspense The communal Award was published on the 17th August, 1932, giving separate electorates to the Depressed Classes as in the cases of the Muslims and Europeans The all Indian leaders unanimously agreed to two points, first, that the life of Mahatma Gandhi must be saved and secondly, untouchability must go, at any cost The leaders of caste Hindus and the Depressed Classes signed the Poona pact on 24th September 1932 Mahatma Gandhi's fast terminated in the afternoon of the 26th September 1932

One remarkable effect of Mahatma Gandhi s fast was to set in motion effectual forces through out the country for removal of the curse of untouchability[15]

THE FORMATION OF A PROVINCIAL BOARD

The Bihar response regarding the uplift of depressed classes was splendid Here, work for uplift of the Harijan had already begun On the 17th July, 1932, a meeting was held in Model

School at Gaya and a Depressed Class member addressed the meeting and distributed Ilaichi and Supari to the audiences[16] In fact several meetings were held at Gaya, Aurangabad, Barh, *Mokamah, Arrah, Buxar, and in many other places*

In September, 1932, effort for temple entry for scheduled castes were successfully observed As for Brahampur temple in Sahabad, the orthodox people were opposed to the people entry[17]

A provincial organisation for anti untouchability work soon came to existence in Bihar An anti untouchability conference was held *on the 6th November, 1932 in the Anjuman-I-Islamia* Hall Patna Raja Radhika Raman Prasad Sinha was its President Shri Amrit Lal V Thakkar and Rajendra Prasad were also present in this meeting 18

In Ranchi, Hazaribagh and Manbhum districts there was very little objection to temple entry In other places 236 temples were opened to Harijans About 3000 Harijan students were receiving education at that time in Bihar About 600 Harijans had been newly admitted to the school through the effort of the workers of society

In this province, so far as educational institutions were *concerned, only Dom Bhangi Halalkhor and Mehtar were* considered as the Depressed Classes[19]

THE HARIJAN TOUR OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Mahatma Gandhi started his Harijan tour between November 1933 and August 1934 and travelled about 12,500 miles for the *uplift of Harijans*

Mahatma Gandhi postponing his harijan tour in the south started for Patna on 9th March 1934 listening about the earthquake in Bihar

"It was a Divine chastisement sent by God for our sin , but Rabindra Nath Tagore gave a sharp rejoinder to this statement at Patna – 'Whilst anti touchability work is undoubtedly greater and its massage of a permanent character'

Mahatma went to Buxar Deoghar and Ranchi and appealed for the Anti untouchability There were anti-demonstration at Buxar and Deoghar He started back for Orissa to resume his Harijan tour on the 20th May[20]

JAGJIVAN RAM AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN INDIA : EARLY LIFE OF JAGJIVAN RAM

Jagjivan Ram was born on 15th April, 1908 in Chandwa Village, situated a mile and a half to the west of Arrah on the Arrah Buxar road His father Sri Sobhi Ram was a farmer and his grand-father Shri Narayan Ram was an agricultural labour He got his primary education in the village Jagjivan Ram was married at the age of only eight years. In 1922, he joined the Arrah Town High School Later on he did his I Sc from Banaras Hindu University in 1931, he took his B Sc degree from Calcutta University[21]

Shri Jagjivan Ram was always thinking for the lot of his fellow brethren He said - 110388

"Ever since my student days, I was naturally concerned with the lot of my fellow brethren I had been propaganding that untouchability with its denial opportunity and elements of Serfdom was woven in to the socio-economic fabric of Hindu society Therefore, I held it that it could be abolished only when the socio-economic order under went a complete reorganisation It implied a revolution, socio economic-political, bigger than any the world had witnessed so far At the inaugural conference of Bihar Anti-Untouchability league I was astonished at the sermonising attitude of the speakers after having degraded them in servile sub human condition. They must give up taking meat wine and develop cleanliness Lecture appeared to add insult to injury I spoke hastly My out spoken stunned many of those present"

Dr Rajendra Prasad listened very attentively and thoughtfully the lecture of Jagjivan Ram at the meeting After the meeting was over, Dr Rajendra Prasad asked Jagjivan Ram to give some time to Bihar Jagjivan Ram said "That was how I decided not to go to Calcutta, became the Secretary of the Anti untouchability league (later known as the Harijan Sevak Sangh) and my public career in Bihar began" [22]

Babu Jagjivan Ram was not happy with the function of the Harijan Sevak Sangh The Sangh had to function He concluded about the fast of Gandhiji– "I sadly realised that the fast had produced only emotional effervescence but neither a

psychological nor social revolution, nor a fiery in conclusion, it was to be welfare born of pity for the poor untouchables".[23]

Jagjivan Ram became popular when he addressed the provincial anti-untouchability conference held at Patna on 6th November, 1932 In the same month he was appointed Secretary of the Arrah Branch of Anti-untouchability league He was made a paid worker of the above league in January, 1933, as propaganda officer and attended several meetings in Anti-untouchability campaign at Patna, Bhagalpur and other places He was also a prominent leader at the meeting held at Patna in connection with Gandhi's fast in the same year[24]

Jagjivan Ram also joined the Salt Satyagraha in 1930[25] After the Poona Pact a new figure Jagjivan Ram was made all India Depressed Classes leader by Congress and Gandhiji[26]

Babu Jagjivan Ram was impressed with Mahatma Gandhi But he was totally different in his view about the emancipation of untouchability Jagjivan Ram wrote in his book about communal award and Gandhi's fast

"While Gandhiji elaborated and stressed his conception of caste and varna expecting Hindu conscience to catch with a newthinking, he considered the eradication of untouchability as a matter of gravest urgency His fast which commenced on 20th September, 1932 as a protest against communal award was a historic event The Congress men of Sahabad had sent a telegram to Mahatma Gandhi intimating that they wanted to be represented as nationalist Depressed Classes in the Poona parleys 'My elder brother's illness fall in the way, I, however, addressed an angry latter, saying that he could have accepted reservation of seats for Harijans at the Round Table Conference and saved himself the ordeal of the fast His (Gandhiji) Secretary replied that Gandhiji considered any kind of separation bad for both Hindu and untouchables "[27]

In 1934, Jagjivan Ram was very actively participating in he Harijan Movement He accompanied Gandhiji in his Bihar tour in March, 1934 He wrote 'I accompanied Gandhiji in his Bihar tour in 1934 He moved from place to place comforting teaching and preaching to the people At Buxar, there were brickbats and an effort was made to disturb the meeting But it passed off uneventfully There was opposition at Arrah and Patna but no

brickbats However, when we reached Deogahar at 2 O'clock after midnight, the situation was tense Two groups of demonstrators, one for and other against the pact (Poona Pact) had gathered at the station There were skirmishes and exchange of lathi blows. The nearby window pane of the car in which Gandhiji was to be taken was smashed But he was serene and calm The entire route was cordoned by volunteers and Gandhiji was being followed by Thakkar Bapa, Binodanand Jha myself and others who went to the place of meeting When the meeting was about to commence, Gandhiji's presence worked . .. with the incorporation of the Poona pact in the Government of India Act in June 1935, the violent anti-pact agitation died Gandhiji continued his anti-touchability compaign till his last days".[28]

Jagjivan Ram was appointed Assistant Secretary of Bihar Provincial Harijan Sevak Sangh and supervisor of works in eight districts [29]

When R L Biswas, President and P N Raja Bhoj, General Secretary of the All India Depressed Classes league visited Patna, Jagjivan Ram stayed with them at the house of Ram Prasad C T in Bankipur, and was one of those who were responsible for holding of the Depressed Classes leaders conference Babu Jagjivan Ram was elected president of the conference and also the president of the provincial Depressed Class league [30]

In the conference, Jagjivan Ram in his presidential speech threw light on the lot of the Depressed Classes of Bihar, which, according to him were more depressed and down-trodden than in any other province He urged the audience to form a strong central organisation impressing all the various communities dubbed as depressed and while devising salvation, present a united front to the world He spoke at length on the evils of the Poona Pact and warned the Depressed Classes against the hallucination, of the proposed second chamber for B and O which, according to him, would only serve to give more power to the more powerful and still further exploit the exploited [31]

A depressed classes conference was held in the Bankipur Theosophical Society Hall on July. 28, 1935 The president, Jagjivan Ram in his address, while explaining the object of holding conference, said *Our province is one of the most backward*

provinces in the country and as regards ourselves we are far inferior to the Depressed Classes in other provinces Depressed Classes organisations have been working for the betterment of their condition for many years past But in our province though organisation of individual communities, such as 'Dusadh Mahasabha", "Ravidas Mahasabha' and the Pasi Sudhar Sammelan, are trying for the social reform of their respective communities, no efforts have been made to organise the depressed classes and prepare a common platform for them It is for the first time that we representatives of the different communities, embracing the depressed classes, have assembled together Let us today lay the foundation of a strong organisation which may truly represent the Depressed Classes in the province and which may agitate and work for the community[32]

JAGJIVAN RAM AND AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Jagjivan Ram was also trying for the betterment of agricultural labourers, who were mostly Harijans During the time, Kisan Sabha was a farmers' organisation Although Kisan Sabha was working against the Zamindars, but it was also serving the causes of big Kisans It was not the organisation of agricultural labourer However, the most significant development that occurred was with respect to Harijans In Bihar, they sponsored such young leader like Jagjivan Ram from the rank of Harijans Very soon this effort was turned against the Kisan Sabha which was posing a great challenge to the Congress Jagjivan Ram formed the Khet Majdoor Sabha, one of the first agricultural labour organisations in the country This embrassed the tenants in the Kisan Sabha, many of the whom were big tenants, employing agricultural labourer[33] Early in his youth he took up Congress work and when occasions demanded he courted imprisonment along with others

In 1937, when Mr Yunus formed an interim ministry; Jagjivan Ram had been elected member of Bihar Legislative assembly and Mr Yunus tried hard to win him over and offered him a place in cabinet, so that he would get support of the Harijan members But Jagjivan Ram unhesitatingly spurned his offer and the ministership that went along with it Dr Rajendra Prasad, having come to know of it, informed Mahatmaji He was greatly pleased

and made a mention of this fact in one of his articles. Thereafter, he joined the provincial Congress committee and when congress formed a ministry some time later, he was appointed as parliamentary secretary Though he wished to be a minister, but he did not press because of Mr Jaglal Choudhary being placed in the ministry As a parliamentary secretary he worked hard to fulfil his responsibility very well. His relation with the Congress workers became closer day by day[34] Jagjivan Babu wrote in his book–

"In *1937*, in a meeting at Gopalganj in Bihar, where Dr Rajendra Prasad and many Bihari leaders were present, I stressed what I considered to be an inadequacy of the national movement, I said that the movement was predominately political in inspiration and out look, and unless it developed vertically and *fundamentally* became a movement for the radical reorganisation of society, the inspiration to raise the status of the Harijan might exhibit itself prematurely I emphasised that basically, the inspiration was an urge for fuller and higher life It is held by some that the social problem *of untouchability is economic*" [35]

In November, 1941, the District Depressed Classes held a meeting at Sahabad, Jagjivan Ram took a great part in it During the August revolution of 1942, Jagjivan Ram led the Arrah people with Sardar Harihar Singh, Ramanand Tiwary, Ambika Saran Singh *and others*[36] *Jagjivan Ram was sent to the Hazaribagh Jail* on 20 8 1942 vide order No 235 dated 21.8 1942[37]

When Jagjivan Ram was in Hazaribagh Jail in 1942-43, most of the Bihar leaders were also with him in the same ward In Hazaribagh Jail, the socialist prisoners organised classes on *Marxism which was the raging fashion of the day Jagjivan Ram* felt that the socialist teachers started with a bias in favour of Marxism Independently, he himself started taking separate classes in Marxist theory and practice He would also lecture on Gandhian Doctrines. It would appear that Jagjivan Babu had a deep interest in political thought

On coming out of jail his first concern was to resume his Depressed Classes league activities[38]

By June 1942, India was anticipating the possible advent of the Japanese The masses were so nurtured that they were

prepared to think of them as liberators, but Gandhiji was clear in his mind, he said on 26th June, 1942, "I would rather be shot than submit to the Japanese or any foreign power" The country was simmering, with rage in frustration like one vast bulk of highly inflammable material

All India Congress Committee met in Bombay on August 7, 1942, adopted a resolution, assuring the British that an Indian Government would resist aggression with all the armed as well as non violent forces at its command and urged for an immediate declaration of the Indian independence But, if the appeal failed, the congress resolution further said, it would be compelled to start a civil disobedience movement. After the resolution was adopted, Gandhiji addressed after mid night on August 8 He wanted to have one more interview with the Viceroy But the British were in no mood for parleys Gandhi, Nehru and others were awakened, some time after they had gone to sleep and carried off to prison The whole country was in revolt the next morning Gandhiji had given only two slogans "Quit India" to Britishers He had told his countrymen "Do or Die" Each man was his own leader after Gandhi and other leaders were arrested

Jagjivan Ram and Prof Abdul Bari were in a hotel in Delhi, where they were informed by a friendly source in the early hours of the morning about the arrest of the national leaders Gandhiji had expressed a desire to see both Jagjivan Ram and Abdul Bari on the 9th morning Jagjivan Ram left for Patna immediately As Secretary of the Bihar Congress, he would have much to do after reaching there He felt that organisation work had become more important than the agitation If the Congress was to lead the resistance movement, it must develop a resistance organisation All important localities in Patna had been barricaded by British soldiers. The barricades could be crossed only on passes issued by the British authority The passes were naturally not given to the leaders. The organisation of a proper resistance movement, Jagjivan Ram felt, was not practicable The congress volunteers had not the necessary training and the condition was not Propitious. The revolt could not develop into a machinery for seizure of power A countrywide well coordinated resistance was not practical and the only wayout

under the circumstances was to have widely scattered pockets of resistance unapproachable by armed units and where the spirit of August Revolution would survive The situation was handled in a fine manner by Shri Jagjivan Ram It was again an evidence of his political wisdom[39]

With the announcement of Gandhiji that each man was his own leader, his message had spread throughout the country and people everywhere behaved as they liked The Congressmen came to meet Jagjivan Ram and they wanted to cut electricity and telephone lines and water connections. Jagjivan Ram was the president of the electric workers and joint water workers union He was against disruption of water and electricity supply but permitted the cutting of telephone wires It was his political wisdom to give the movement a new look of moral responsibility When the post office, situated near his house in Kadamkuan was burnt, not a penny was touched In fact, the illiterate masses who burnt the Post Office were revolutionaries, not hooligans[40]

Jagjivan Babu met Ananda Prasad Choudhary, a former Bengali revolutionary in a house in Gardanibagh where he was staying Chakradhar Sharan had accompanied him A lively discussion ensued on what would be the steps in the Quit India Movement of 1942 Jagjivan Ram stood for complete dislocation of the means of communications which would completely paralyse the administration and keep the movement going and gain time to spread in far off areas Anand Choudhary agreed with him but he quoted a permanent leader of Russia to prove his contention that disruption of the means of communication should be the last stage of the revolution As no decision could be reached, it was agreed to consult Ram Dayalu Sinha, a veteran Congress leader who was ailing Movement from one part of the city to another part was becoming extremely difficult Jagjivan Ram was the Secretary of Bihar Congress He was the leader of Bihar people who had risen in a magnificent way and had paralysed British Administration

Ram Dayalu Sinha, arranged for passes for both Jagjivan Ram and Chakradhar Sharan but Jagjivan Ram was arrested in the afternoon of August, 20, 1942, before they could be delivered the pass[41]

When, Khan Bahadur Omer Khan, the Additional Magistrate, went to arrest him, Jagjivan Ram had several important papers

and some money in his pocket But no search was made Omar told him that he could take his own time in getting ready Jagjivan Ram handed over the papers and money to Congress worker gathered there and gave final instructions to Jamail Mazhari Thus began Jagjivan Ram's second baptism of jail life[42]

Dr Rajendra Prasad, Dr S K Sinha, Dr A N Sinha, Sarangdhar Singh, Satyanarayan, Mahamaya Prasad, Phulan Prasad Verma and many others were in Bankipur Jail with Jagjivan Ram The August movement was slowly ebbing away There remained, however, pockets of resistance which continued to defy the might of the British and held the banner of freedom flying But such pockets of revolt and resistance were not many and even in these regions there was lack of proper leadership

Jagjivan Ram was released after 14 months from the jail in an indifferent health The Bihar C I D, very diligently shadowed him where ever he went by keeping a close watch

In September, 1944, Jagjivan Ram undertook an extensive tour of C P and Bombay, both for Congress and league work. At Nagpur, the working committee of all India Depressed Classes league met under his presidentship and prepared the memorandum which was presented on behalf of the All India Depressed Classes league to the Sapru Committee Jagjivan Ram organised a constructive workers organisation with the assistance of Abdul Bari at Patna The organisation continued to do useful work till the end of 1945[43]

Jagjivan Ram was faced with a difficult situation He could not hold the view that the untouchables were a separate nation At the same time he could not leave untouchables' interest Raj Gopalacharya evolved a formula for Congress league understanding in June, 1944 Certainly, the Harijans were a part of Indian Nation but their interests should be safeguarded A meeting of All India Depressed Classes league was held under *the leadership of Jagjivan Ram on August 18, 1944 The meeting* observed that neither Gandhiji nor Raj Gopala Charya's formula took any notice of the untouchables, and stressed that the interests of the depressed Classes must be safeguarded in any political arrangement to be arrived at between the Congress *and the Muslim league on the one hand and the Government* on the other[44]

On 12th of August, 1946, Nehru formed a provisional Government consisting of six Congress men of whom five were caste Hindus and one Harijan Jagjivan Ram entered as a Harijan nominee He entered the executive council as India's Labour Minister, being the youngest of all[45]

Jagjivan Ram was a great political leader and a statesman He had influenced the great events and taken decisions of national importance He was one of the few in modern India who had the clear conception and rare vision of future India Rather, he was one of the builders of New India Throughout his lifelong political career, Jagjivan Ram had been a torch bearer of patriotism and selfless service to the suffering humanity[46]

JAGLAL CHOUDHARY

Shri Jaglal Choudhary was a national leader coming from Harijan community He was born at Garkha a village in the Saran District of Bihar Province His father s name was Mushan Choudhary, who was illiterate and a toddy-seller Jaglal Choudhary was married at the age of fifteen with Jageshwari Devi Jageshwari Devi also belonged to a poor and illiterate family

Although himself an illiterate, Mushan Choudhary was very much anxious for his son's education, and got him admitted into the village primary school In 1903 he passed primary examination, then got himself admitted into Chapra Zila School He passed his matriculation examination at the age of seventeen, and he got first division In 1914, he passed I Sc Examination from the Patna College and joined the Calcutta medical College[47]

When he was in the final year of the M B Course, he gave up his studies at the call of Mahatma Gandhi and joined the non cooperation movement in 1921[48]

Jaglal Choudhary was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and Rajendra Prasad The personality, character and above all patriotism of Rajendra Prasad had always been a great source of inspiration to him He was a member of Saran District Congress *and also of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee* during 1921 1922 Since 1921 he had been occupying a permanent place in the public life of Bihar He also lived for

some time at Tikapati Gandhi Ashram in the district of Purnea He organised the works of the Congress in this area

During the salt Satyagraha he took part very actively and was arrested After coming out of jail he again actively worked for the Congress and was engaged in carrying out the constructive programme of the party[49]

After certain declaration on the part of the British Government, the Congress working committee decided at its meeting held at Wardha on 8th July, 1937 that Congressman were permitted to accept office where they may be invited thereto But the committee made it clear that office was to be accepted and utilised for the purpose of working in accordance with the lines laid down in the Congress election manifesto and for furthering in every possible way the Congress policy of combating the new act on the one hand and of respecting the constructive programme on the other[50]

At this time, a meeting of the Bihar provincial conference was held at Masrack, a village in Saran district The president of the meeting was Abdul Bari and participants were Rajendra Prasad and others. The Governor of Bihar invited Shri Krishna Sinha The leaders had some preliminary discussions about the formation of the ministry[51]

The Congress ministry was soon formed in several provinces–Bombay, Madras, Bihar, Orissa and United and Central Provinces In Bihar, a congress ministry was formed on 20th July, 1937 Shri Krishna Sinha was the Prime Minister The other ministers were Anugraha Narayan Sinha, Syed Mahmud and Jaglal Choudhary Jaglal Choudhary assumed charge of his office on 20th July, 1937 as a cabinet minister of Excise and Public Health[52]

As soon as he assumed office, he undertook the experiment of introducing prohibition compaign on 6th April, 1938, in the District of Saran Subsequently, prohibition was introduced in the district of Muzaffarpur, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad and Ranchi[53]

The Bihar Ministry resigned on the question of release of political prisoners The Bihar ministry wrote in the letter of resignation, dated 15th February, 1938 "We feel that condition in which power is discharged, special responsibility in respect of peace and order could be legitimately exercised do not exist in province"[54]

After the resignation of Bihar Ministry, Jaglal Choudhary started individual Satyagraha In November, 1941, he was arrested for offering individual Satyagraha [55]

According to a Government publication "In Bihar Mr Jaglal Choudhary, who had been a Congress Minister from 1937 39 and who was one of Mr Gandhi's trusted men, personally instigated the burning of a police station in the Saran District and during the attack urged the crowd to tie up the Sub-Inspector in a sack and throw him in the river This same minister made plans to resist troops with spears, lightened torch " Shri *Jag Lal Choudhary had received various concurrent sentences* for his activities in Quit India Movement The sentences were upheld by the reviewing Judge of the Patna High Court [56]

In Saran District, Shri Jaglal Choudhary was then moving in the villages in that area He was organising the people to oppose the troops and to carry on the movement even in the face of their bullets and bayonets On the 19th August, a mob attacked the post office and the police station at Garkha, Darauli (Siwan) and Katiya (Gopalganj) and the staff of the police station were evacuated there On the 22nd August, troops also fired on a party in Garkha killing two persons One of the persons killed was Shri Inderdeo Choudhary, son of Shri Jaglal Choudhary and Jaglal Choudhar was himself was arrested on 23rd August at Basantpur [57]

Shri Jaglal Choudhary and his family made great sacrifices during Quit India Movement His son, Inderdeo Choudhary was shot dead on 22nd August, 1942, in Garkha village at Saran District by Military Police Shri Jaglal Choudhary was out of village He was arrested at Chapra on 23rd August, 1942 He wrote "The S I Police who arrested me at Chapra in the morning of the 23rd August, 1942, told me while escorting me to the police station that one of my sons had been shot dead by Military Police at Garkha and that the body of deceased was in his possession On reaching the police station he showed me the dead body at my request, sent for my brother in law and gave away the dead body to him

One of my nephews, who had come to Chapra to trace the whereabout of the dead body of the boy I learnt that the boy had been murdered on the stair case of a neighbour's

house which the military police had forced their way in On my release from prison I went home last April. I was showed the spot where he was shot while coming down stairs and I found it was only a few steps up the ground He had (Inderdeo Choudhary) studied Gandhian literature of non-violence, had peacefully received lathi blows on head before secretariat building and must have received the military bullet equally peacefully"[58]

Sd/- Jaglal Choudhary
23/1/1947

Dr S K Sinha, in 1946, as Prime Minister of Bihar, answered the question of Murli Manohar Prasad, regarding the death of the son of Jaglal Choudahry and K. P Singh

"As regards the death of the son of the Hon'ble Mr Jaglal Choudhary it is reported that on the 22nd August, 1942, a military force accompanied by Superintendent of Police, Saran and a Deputy Magistrate, visited the village Garkha in connection with the 1942 disturbances. While the party was moving through the street, they were stoned and they opened fire Late Srijut Inderdeo, son of Hon'ble Mr Jaglal Choudhary was shot dead on the stair case of neighbour's house It appears that S P ordered that he should to beaten on the buttock"[59]

As regards Congress affairs in Bihar in 1944 and 1945, we may note that, with the gradual release of freedom fighters, effort for constructive work and social service revived The collection for the Kastoorba fund and sale of Khadi continued The special occasions of national importance began to be celebrated Some prominent leaders and freedom fighters were arrested in April, 1944 Jaglal Choudhary was also imprisoned on 19th September, 1945 The British Prime Minister Attlee and Lord Wavell made announcements regarding steps to be taken by them for the solution of the Indian constitutional problem They also declared that the election of the Central and provincial legislatures would be held during the winter session of 1945-46 The Indian National Congress decided to contest the election The untiring efforts of leaders of Bihar were greatly facilitated the Congress success in the election On 30th March, 1946, the Governor of Bihar formally

asked Sri Krishna Sinha for his assistance in forming a ministry Shri Krishna Sinha, Anugraha Narain Sinha and Syed Mahmud took oaths of office and secrecy at 11 00 a m on 30th March, 1946. Shri Jaglal Choudhary was released from imprisonment and appointed the fourth minister After a few days the ministry was expanded to include five ministers

On 19th April, Mr Jaglal Choudhary presided over a public meeting in honour of the ex I N A Officer Mahboob Ahmad [60]

In the 1946 Ministry, Jaglal Choudhary was a cabinet minister with public health and Harijan Welfare Department As he was an idealist and had no lust for power and office, he could not remain in office for long [61]

In 1953 Jaglal Choudhary wrote a book entitled "A plan to reconstruct Bharat" He stood for equal rights and opportunities for men and women of all classes. He believed in the principles of tolerance But he regarded the caste system as the greatest curse of the Hindu Society He was an advocate of Hindu Muslim unity He believed in the essential unity of all religions He believed in freedom for faith of individuals [62]

During his long political career, he had been associated with Dr Rajendra Prasad Being an eminent nationalist he had a place among the freedom fighters of Bihar He was known to be a man of unimpeachable integrity and a true Gandhian.[63]

BHOLA PASWAN SHASTRI

Bhola Paswan was an eminent leader of the Depressed Classes in Bihar He was born at village Sabutar, Post Sarsi, Thana Dhamdaha in the District of Purnea He got his primary education at his village in Purnea District He got his Shastri degree from Banaras Hindu University or Kashi Vidya Peeth

He was the Vice-President of the Purnea local Board before 1946 For some time he was associated with a paper named "Rashtrabani" at Patna He was also associated with 'viswamitra', a paper published from Calcutta

He was an eminent freedom fighter and was under arrest in 1942's Quit India Movement In 1946 he became the parliamentary secretary of the Bihar Legislative Assembly [64] In Quit India Movement, Bhola Shastri led the Purnea District with other Congress leaders The movement made tremendous

progress in the district of Purnea, at that time Shri Shastri was the secretary of the Gokul Krishna Ashram. He was arrested on 12th September, 1942 He was detained under rule 26 (1) (6) of the defence of India rules in connection with the civil disobedience movement in the month of September His No was 4454, date of order was 27 10 1942 and date of arrest was 12 9 42 in Purnea Jail

He was an eminent Gandhian and he believed in Ahimsa as a strong method, as a weapon of struggle for freedom After independence he was in the different ministries in Bihar and also at the centre[65] *He was Chief Minister of Bihar for three times* and a Cabinet minister in centre in regime of Indira Gandhi

RAMJEET CHAMAR

Ramjeet Chamar was a freedom fighter and a scheduled caste political leader He belonged to Saran district He actively participated in he civil disobedience movement in 1942 He was a staunch supporter of the Congress movement of Gandhiji At that time, Sub-Inspector of Gopalganj wrote to Superintendent of Police of Saran District in his file

"To the S P Saran from S I gopalganj'

Ramjeet Chamar, son of Bihari Chamar of village Bisunpura, Mungraha police station, Gopalganj district Saran, his political activities during this current civil disobedience movement He secretly helped the rioters during last civil disobedience movement He is a staunch supporter of the Congress movement'[66]

DUMAR LAL BAITHA

Shri Dumar Lal Baitha was born in a poor scheduled caste (Dhobi) family at Baluwa Kaliyaganj village in Purnea District His father was a local Vaidya His family was influenced by religion The Mahabharat and the Ramayan were their favourite holy books

He got his primary education in the village school He went to his sister's home at Rampura near Farbisganj for his further schooling

He took part in the Quit India Movement on the call of Mahatma Gandhi, when he was in Class IX He gathered the

students of his hostel and led them for wire cutting, for destroying the bridges and railway lines Not only that, he went in the villages and inspired people for taking part in the movement For some time, he took shelter in Nepal After 1952, he actively participated in the Congress politics[67]

SHAKTI KUMAR

Shakti Kumar was born in a poor scheduled caste family by caste Dusadh He belonged to Kanswa village in the Jahanabad district He was a brave freedom fighter and a staunch congress supporter He always struggled for the cause of down-trodden people

He actively took part in the Quit India Movement in 1942 and went to jail as a freedom fighter[68]

KESHWAR RAM

Keshwar Ram was born at Sipah Arwal in Gaya District He was a Scheduled Caste man, by caste Dusadh He was a teacher in the Arwal Middle School and a staunch supporter of the Congress party and its movement He actively took part in the Quit India Movement 1942

The S I Police arrested him and brought him to the police station Keshwar Ram was brutally murdered in the police station by the Daroga After independence, a Road was named Keshwar Road in his memory at Arwal[69]

SHRI KAILU

He was born in the family of Shri Kashi Chamar at Matadih in Monghyr District He took an active part in Quit India Movement and was shot at by the police He died on the spot[70]

DUKHAN

Dukhan was born in a Chamar family at Kurwa in Bhagalpur District He joined the revolutionaries He was imprisoned in connection with bomb explosion case In jail he was severely tortured so that he could reveal the name of his friends, but all in vain He died in jail because of the torture[71]

SHRI JAGDISH

He was born in the family of Shri Bhal Chamar at Sikipur village in Champaran District He was imprisoned during the Quit India Movement and was severely tortured to death in jail [72]

SHRI GANGARAM

Gangarm was born in Sahabad District in the family of Shri Gopal Chamar He was imprisoned during the Quit India Movement on 15th September, 1942. He died of torture which he suffered in jail [73]

SHRI BHUMICHHAN

Bhumichhan was born in a Chamar family at Lalganj in Muzaffarpur district in Bihar He played a major role in Quit India Movement and was shot dead He went to the hospital in an injured condition but his life was not saved He was martyred for his country [74]

SHRI MUSHAR FAGU

He was born in Chamar family at Mushahari village in Bhagalpur District During the Quit India Movement, a procession attacked Sultanganj Railway station Shri Mushahar Fagu was leading the procession The British Soldiers fired at him and he died on the spot [75]

SHRI RAGHUBIR MUSAHAR

He was born in the family of Shri Ganeshwar at Nasej in Sahabad District. He was uprooting the railway track under the leadership of the revolutionaries. The British caught him red-handed and he was shot dead Thus he died on the spot [76]

SHRI SHEETAL

He was born in a Chamar family at Jalabad in Monghyr District He took part in the 1920 movement On 15th February, 1920, Tarapur Police Station was attacked by the revolutionaries under his leadership Police firing left him wounded and he died the same evening for the sake of his country [77]

SHRI SATI

He was born in a Pasi family in 1900 at Tarapur in Monghyr District The revolutionaries attacked Tarapur Police Station on 15th February, 1932, which led to the police firing and consequently he died in the same evening [78]

SHRI RAJENDRA

His father's name was Janki Das. He belonged to Banwaripur village of Patna district tin Bihar By caste he was Dusadh When the revolutionaries attacked a police station in 1942, he was in the lead He was murdered in police firing Thus, he scarified his life for his country

SHRI LAKHAN

He was born in a Dusadh family at Basantpur village in Champaran district in Bihar On 17th August, 1942 the revolutionaries surrounded Dhorasahar Police Station The police firing caused his death on the spot

MUNGERI LAL

He was born at Kurji, Patna in 1910 He got his primary education in St Michael School After that he studied in Bihar Vidyapeeth Mungeri was brought up in a hard situation He says "At our time the education of Scheduled Castes was not possible The Arya Samaj and Kabir panth started working for the uplift of the untouchables Most of Harijans were followers of Kabir panth and Shiv Narain Panth Mungeri Lal belongs to Dusadh Community a Scheduled Caste of Bihar

Mungeri Lal says, I met Gandhi ji in 1934 when the earthquake occurred in Bihar I was deeply influence by Mahatma Gandhi In 1946 Mahatma Gandhi again came to Patna when a riot occurred " He again says "though Harijan Sevak Sangh was for the uplift of Harijans it was not popular among Harijans Mungeri Lal went to jail in 1930, 1934 and in 1942 He was an absoconders After Independent Mungeri Lal served as a Cabinet Minister in Bihar for three times In the Ministry of Vinodanandjha, K B Sahay and Sardar Harihar Singh.

LAKHAN

He was born in a scheduled caste family by caste Dusadh at Basant Pur village in Champaran district in Bihar He took an active part in the Quit India Movement [80]

NOONMAN

He was born in the family of Sri Dharo Dhobi at Domganj Village in Hazaribagh district in Bihar He took active part in the freedom movement and the British soldiers had shot him dead He sacrificed his life for the sake of his country [81]

JAY GOVIND PASWAN

He was born at Sheetalpur village in Muzaffarpur district in Bihar On 30th September 1942, he was martyred in Bithalpur village market in the police firing [82]

SRI PARMESHWAR

He was born in the family of Sri Lalu Paswan at Dhokura village in Purnea district in Bihar On 25th August 1942, the freedom fighters attacked Dhamdhaha Police station He died on the spot because of police firing [83]

JHURI PASWAN

He was the son of Sri Gopi Paswan of Lagani village in Munger district He took active part in the Quit India Movement on 19th August, 1942 A team of English soldiers shot him dead [84]

SRI BUDHAN

He was born in a Paswan family at Kajar Hat village in Muzaffarpur He took an active part in the quit India Movement in 1942 The freedom fighters were holding a meeting in Vidhupur Bazar As soon as he finished addressing the meeting the police shot at him He died on the spot [85]

SRI BHAGWAT

Sri Bhagwat was born in the family of Sri Lalji Paswan at Thahar village in Darbhanga district During the Quit India Movement, he died on the spot because of the police firing [86]

SRI LIKHRU

He was born in a Paswan family at Maltola in Bhagalpur district When the police opened fire at the freedom fighters on 6th November, 1942 in Kari Hat he died on the spot [87]

SRI MUSAHARU

He was born in a Pasi family at Bari village in Munger district A crowd of the freedom fighters attacked Barauni station on 18th August, 1942 Police opened fire He died near the coal depot [88]

SRI SUNDAR LAL

He was born in a Chamar family at Fatehpur in Munger district He took an active part in the Quit India Movement The revolutionaries attacked Bayasi Police Station He was caught by the police and his arms and legs were broken in the police station He died in Bhagalpur jail on 11th October, 1942 [89]

SRI MEHRA SUNDAR

He was born in the family of Sri Gena at Chapra in Bihar He was by caste Chamar On 13th August, 1942, he was sentenced to 4 years rigorous imprisonment and 15 canes under section 35 (B) [90]

SRI GUJAROR GUROJ

His father's name was Mithalo and was born in a Dhobi family at Sanjhauli in Shahabad District He was martyred on the spot in Sanjhauali railway station firing case on August 17th, 1942 [91]

BENGALI

He was a resident of Gauspur village in Darbhanga district in Bihar He was by caste Dusadh He played a major role in the Quit India Movement in 1942 The revolutionaries attacked Dalasingh Police Station He was shot at by the police He was admitted in a hospital where he died after four months Earlier he was also sentenced to 5 years rigorous imprisonment in connection with Chauri Chaura case [92]

SRI KARU RAM DUSADH

Sri Karu Ram Dusadh was a school teacher in Mission School

Hazaribagh He was a freedom fighter and a true Gandhian He was elected as an M L A from Giridih Cum-Chatra seat on 29th , January, 1937[93]

He took an active part in the 1942 Quit India Movement, on the 18th August, the people at Tilaiya were chastised by European S P and the military They arrested some of the leading workers and many other persons there, the number being 113 of whom 90 along with Chhatu Ram All were sent to Hazaribagh jail Many persons were also arrested at Giridih, Chatra, Rajdhanwar and Dumari, of them Sri Karu Ram was arrested on the charge of exciting the Santals to attack the Dumari Police Station[94]

INDERDEO CHOUDHARY

Inderdeo Choudhary was the eldest son of Sri Jaglal Choudhary He actively took part in 1942's Quit India Movement Sri Jaglal Choudhary, his eldest son Inderdeo and second son Dharmdeo Choudhary were freedom fighters In 1942 when Gandhiji's call 'to do or die' was proclaimed Inderdeo was a student He was with the students, who were trying for hoisting Flag at Patna secretariat on 11th August, 1942 After being wound by police lathi Inderdeo Choudhary, anyhow reached Garkha, his native village with his younger brother Dharmdeo Choudhary[95]

On 22 August 1942, Inderdeo Choudhary and Saryug Singh stoned on military police at Garkha The police fired on Inderdeo and he was shot dead by police bullet ·

"On the 22 August, 1942 troops also fired on the mob at Garkha as a result of which two persons were killed and two were injured One of the persons killed was Inderdeo Choudhary"[96]

His father, Sri Jaglal Choudhary said on his son's death, 'Mere Bete Ne Ma Ka Karj Utar Diya Hai Mai Dhanya Ho Gaya ' (My son has paid back the debt of his mother I am a blessed one)[97]

SRI BHOLA

Bhola was born in a Scheduled Caste family, by caste Chamar He belonged to Kabilaspur village of Durgawati Block in Sahabad District He trook an active part in 1942's Quit India Movement He was shot dead by police firing[98]

SRI MAHANGU PASI

Mahangu Pasi was a depressed class person born in a Pasi family at Sasaram in Shahabad district He also played an active role in 1942's Quit India Movement and was killed by police firing [99]

KAPIL HARIJAN

Kapil was born in Shahabad district at Kailbar village He was shot dead by police in 1942's Quit India Movement.[100]

BHOLA MEHTAR

Bhola was born in a depressed class family Sweeper by caste He belonged to Zamira village at Arraha Sub-division. He was martyred on the spot in 1942's Quit India Movement [101]

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4

FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN BENGAL AND PARTICIPATION OF COMMON PEOPLE

In 19th century when organised politics of the modern times made its first appearance in Bengal, it was fully dominated by Bhadralok The highly educated and landed class people of urban areas were attached with politics This was rather a very small group of people, mostly residents in the city of Calcutta They *began the first political associations in the province which has* later merge with the early National Congress. Their approach was gentle and peaceful But after the partition of Bengal in 1905, and with the Swadeshi Movement, the mass agitation and mobilisation became part of organised politics [1]

During the time of Swadeshi Movement, there also emerged another trend which became very important in the organised politics of Bengal This was the politics of revolutionary terrorism

Before 1920s, the terrorist groups shunned mass activity One reason *for this was organisational, prompted by the requirements* of secret conspiratorial work But ideologically, too, there was considerable scepticism, even contempt, about the political maturity of the mass agitation [2]

NON-COOPERATION AND OTHER PROGRAMMES OF MAHATMA GANDHI IN BENGAL

In the 1920, the Non-cooperation and the Khilafat Movement were launched by the Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi *The Non-Cooperation and the Khilafat movements* introduced the process of bringing wider section of Bengal's peasantry into the fold of organised political movement Naturally, in the composition of different strata of the political leadership, the former exclusiveness of Bhadralok politics became no longer

tenable[3] But in the opinion of G B Poll, the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Khilafat could not receive a very good response in Bengal except among the Urdu speaking group of Pan-Islamist in Calcutta[4] About the Non-Cooperation Movement, N K Bose says, "But as the Non-Cooperation Movement gained force elsewhere, it was not at first greeted with adequate enthusiasm in Bengal"

So when Gandhiji's programme of the Non violent non-cooperation was placed before the country, the response of Bengal was of a lukewarm kind The programme was negative and charged with very moralistic consideration, so it was not much popular In another words it did not appear heroic enough after what the revolutionary parties had tried to achieve in 1915 in the way of armed revolt[5]

Inspite of an initial reluctance in Bengal, the politics oriented middle class participated in the non-cooperation movement of 1921. In 1921, there was a well organised movement in Midnapore district against the Government proposal to introduce the Union Board system in place of Choukidari system There was a second movement in Tarakeswar, in West Bengal, where the temple and its property lieges under the head of neighbouring monastery, who had virtually converted everything into private receive The movement was designed to bring the religious institution under public control[6]

Regarding the various movements launched by the Congress in different parts of Bengal during the period of the National Movement, and the nature and function of the Congress organisation, have been studied in detail by Dr Hitesranjan Sanyal[7]

These studies show that the Congress was able to draw considerable support from different sections of peasantry in these areas. The studies are based on South Western Bengal From the 1920s, the organised Congress movement, became, for many people in the region the successor to those earlier movements of mass mobilisation on social issues.[8]

In the later period, between 1923 and 1929, there was further local satyagraha in Brikutsa in Rajshahi district, Bandabila in Jessore, Burdwan in West Bengal, Patuakhali in Barisal, against the introduction of union Board system One could conclude that

Bengal went through a formative period of drilling and experience in non-violence during these important years[9]

A new band of non-violent political workers had been organised in the districts of Hoogly, Burdwan, Rajshahi, Dacca and elsewhere and continued to workout the constructive programme suggested by Gandhiji

THE DEPRESSED CLASSES MOVEMENT IN BENGAL

In Bengal Namsudras were among the depressed classes. They were acquiring English education with the help of the Christian missionaries The Europeans of Calcutta contacted some leaders of the Namsudra community in East Bengal and among them they found favourable response The European Association assumed that a grant of anything approaching self government would place many of the lower castes under the heel of the few of the higher caste people and would snap the tie between the British and Indian people to which the lower castes looked for their ultimate emancipation[10]

The Namsudras of Faridpur, who started developing associations after 1901 at the initiative of a tiny elite of educated and the encouragement of some missionaries were untouchable poor peasants who felt upper caste or gentry exploitation to be a next door enemy than the British overlord[11]

Some of the Namsudras were land lords and many were finding their way into the profession by acquiring the English education The Christian missionaries influenced them strongly The Baptist missionaries materially helped them in acquiring English education The Namsudras did not become Christians, but they grew as a separate political force like Muslims The reason was the high caste domination on the level of economy to which they could aspire by virtue of their English education In 1906, an assembly of some Namsudras in Bakarganj under the local Namsudra Zamindar prayed most earnestly that the Hon'ble Mr Hare, Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, would bestow the same rights and privileges upon the Namsudras as had been done upon the Mahomedans The Namsudras and the Mahomedans were the predominating communities in East Bengal and the latter unlike the Hindus possessed a good deal of sympathy for the Namsudras[12]

The Namsudras and Muslims combined against Brahmans in a quarrel over the performance of a religious ceremony in a village near Khulna [13]

After three years the Namsudras and Muslim peasantry fell out among themselves In 1911 there was a terrible riot in Khulna and Jessore between these two communities. The relation between these two communities had never been easy and amiable But the respectable classes of both communities became closely involved in this agrarian dispute and participated in organising the attacking parties In Jessore, the Pukka house of a Namsudra leader was partly burnt The leader's name was Umesh Chandra Sardar The two respectable Muslims, who rode about on ponies directing the operation were arrested in this connection [14]

The Hindu press took this opportunity to win over the favour of the Namsudras by supporting their cause and condemning the Muslim rowdyism A Depressed Class mission was founded by Caste Hindus The mission was to spread education among the Namsudras of Jessore and Khulna The intention was to counter act the communal propaganda of missionaries who were trying their best to win over the Namsudras and to instigate them against the higher classes of Hindus A newspaper named 'Namsudra Suhrid' was published from Faridpur by C S Made The paper was regarded as anti caste Hindu But the caste Hindus' effort was very poor regarding winning over Namsudra's support The record of the Depressed Class mission was very negligible compared with Baptist effort and it was openly admitted in 1911's annual meeting of the Depressed Class mission that the mission had not made such progress because it lacked funds

A large number of Namsudras were students in Colleges in Calcutta by the beginning of the First World War But they were finding it difficult to get accommodation in hostels because of untouchability in practice The only remedy that the Hindu Press suggested for this problem was that the government should open a separate hostel for Namsudra students and a hostel was constructed in Dacca [15]

These Namsudra students enabled some leaders of the community, with the help of Europeans businessmen, to stage a provincial political demonstration, for the first time, in 1917 in

the winter season About thirty Namsudra representatives, from various districts of Bengal, were elected at special meetings. A Namsudras meeting was held in a European institution in the Dalhousie Institute In the meeting they declared that the transfer of power from the government to a few political leaders under the reforms would make the future progress of the backward classes impossible Several meetings were held in almost all he district headquarters of the East Bengal supporting the resolutions passed in the Dalhousie institute Thus the Namsudra agitation counteracted the Home rule movement [16]

In 1918, Montagu Chelms Ford report had recommended the abolition of separate electorates in Muslim-Majority provinces like Bengal However, Franchise Committee came round in the view that separate electorate must be provided for Muslim in Bengal The Government of Bengal made provisions for the nomination of a representative of the Depressed Classes in the Bengal Legislative Council [17]

Elected Members			*Nominated Members*		
Non Muslim urban	–	11	Indian Christians	–	01
Non-Muslim rural	–	35	*Depressed Classes*	–	01
Muslim urban	–	6	Others	–	02
Muslim rural	–	33	Officials	–	20
Landlords	–	*05*	Others	–	02
					26
Universities of Dacca and Calcutta	–	*02*	*Grand Total*		140
European general	–	05			
European commerce	–	11			
Anglo Indian	–	02			
Indian commerce	–	04			
Total		114			

Source *Government of Bengal report on the working of the reformed* Constitution in Bengal (1921-1927) Calcutta 1928 PP 136-37

After 1920 the Scheduled Castes began to organise in Bengal The Namsudras were the largest and politically most organised Scheduled Caste group in undivided Bengal They were mainly

concentrated in the East Bengal district and were organised under the Scheduled Caste Federation which had linkage with Dr B R Ambedkar[18] When the Simon Commission visited Calcutta in 1927, the representatives of Namsudras and other depressed caste people submitted their representations[19]

The Census report of India, 1931, Vol V, shows the distribution of population and their percentage in district wise population of West Bengals

CASTE AND RELIGIOUS DIVISION 1931
(as percentage of total population)

District	Upper Caste Hindus	Middle Caste Hindus	Depressed Classes	Tribes	Muslims	Other Religions
Burdwan	9 81	29 07	34 50	7 69	18 56	0 57
Birbhum	6 44	22 45	36 50	7 82	26 60	0 10
Bankura	11 29	39 70	31 81	12 51	4 59	0 10
Manbhum	7 07	47 50	22 52	16 29	6 59	0 71
Midnapore	6 31	58 17	19 15	8 54	7 59	0 24
Hoogly	10 33	41 84	27 00	4 50	16 17	0 10
Hawrah	10 48	46 58	20 86	0 42	21 27	0.33
24 Pargana	6 04	27 61	29 95	1 97	33 65	0 78
Nadia	4 84	21 99	10 19	0 54	61 77	0 67
Mursidabad	3 79	25 31	13.24	2 00	55 56	0 15

The census report shows that the percentage of population of the Depressed Classes in West Bengal was the second largest So, the Depressed Classes organised in Bengal and united under the leadership of Dr B R. Ambedkar and Mr M B Mullick

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND THE PARTICIPATION OF THE GRASS ROOT

The anti union Board and anti-Chowkidari tax agitation was perhaps even more of a grassroots issue and in places like Tamlak and Contain in Midnapore or Vishnupur in Bankura, the pressure for beginning this particular form of agitation came from the local Congress committees In the selected areas like Contai, Tamlak, Vishnupur, Arambagh and Mahisbathan the agitation flared up and most section of villagers participated in it A large number of Chowkidars resigned, homesteads and granaries were

burnt for not paying tax The police loot arson and torture became those village fock's daily life fare In certain areas villagers would flee in a body for a number of days to escape paying tax and took shelter in nearby forest when the police went on the rampage[20]

An indication of the social composition of the movement can be found in the classification of Bengal prisoners connected with civil disobedience launched in August 1930 Not less than 3 133 were given C-class in jail out of a total of 4,323 prisoners in Dinajpur Many Santals and Rajbanshis[21] were arrested as Satyagrahis The Santal Oraons and Mundas of Midnapore Manbhum and Singhbum joined the Congress in large number Men of the Tana Bhagat sect of Purulia travelled a far off distance to come to the local Congress office and enrolled themselves as members In the words of the Inspector-General of Police E J Lowman– "I had no idea that the Congress organisation could enlist the sympathy and support of such ignorant and uncultivated people"[22]

The Low Caste grassroots resisted in the first week of June in Chechuahat – Daspur area of Ghatal subdivision in Midnapore district Two policemen who had become notorious in the smashing up of a Bengal Pradesh Congress committee camp at Shyamganj were murdered when they went there to arrest some volunteers. All the forty five men were arrested in connection with the murder All of them were local people including many Mahisya and some Bagdis (Scheduled Caste)[23]

On 6 June, a strong police party with the Additional Magistrate A S P and sixteen armed policemen under a British sergeant and sixteen ordinary constables came to investigate the incident They met a crowd of about six thousand people at Daspur in a state of frenzied excitement The crowd gathered on the opposite side of the Kangshabati river bed and two of them crossed the Khal and told the police to go away The crowd defied the police ultimatum to give up the culprits of murder A peasant named Prankrishna Guchait asked the police How would you like to be beaten with broomstick and shoes ? " He also said that the British ruled in India for about 150 years It was a plunder[24]

The police fired twenty two rounds on crowd They had fired again when on the way back they met another crowd of about

five hundred villagers About three hundred Santal also joined the Daspur crowd Incidentally the Bandar volunteers had been receiving food supplies from surrounding villages and training Bagdis and other Scheduled Caste members in lathi play[25]

The Ghatal volunteer had already organised a big procession in the town In the procession many Bagdis and low class people participated with lathis in May 1930 Around the same time there were attacks on police parties in the other parts of Midnapore, at Pralapdighi and Balisai, in Contai subdivision and at khirai in Sadar subdivision At Khirai the crowd refused to let the police arrest volunteers despite a lathi charge and firing on them and hit back the police with axes and earth clods'[26]

Some local Congress Committee of Arambagh occasionally got involved in anti-Zamindari activities through their village work From the 1920 and onward there had developed frequent Bargadar combination, mostly lower castes Namsudra and Muslims were combined against the upper Caste Hindu landlords and moneylenders A serious outrage had occurred in Manikganj subdivision of Dacca and spread to other parts of Dacca and Mymen Singh It started from 1920 and continued till 1930[27] In 1929, the Bargadars of Jessore stopped cultivation and demanded a greater share of the crop The Praja Samitis started developing in East Bengal and took up the anti-Zamindar issue[28]

The Ganolian resistance broke out in violent form with significant consequences in terms of wider participation From the beginning police atrocities often led to violent resistance activizing regions and sections not generally involved in organised civil disobedience This role of violence in spreading the movement, even if flashes, was marked both in the urban and the rural areas[29]

BENGAL AFTER 1935

The Government of India Act 1935 provided for setting up responsible Government in the eleven provinces in British India The Indian National Congress since its Lucknow Session in 1936 rejected the Act of 1935 There was a great debate at Lucknow if the Congress should, nonetheless, participate in the forthcoming election to provincial legislatures Ultimately it was decided to contest the election[30]

In Bengal, the decision of the Lucknow Congress was generally welcomed Dr B C Roy was the President of B P C C. The elder brother of Subhas Chandra Bose, Sri Sarat Chandra Bose, was given the charge of running the electoral campaign in Bengal on behalf of the congress Party The B P C C issued its own election manifesto

The B P C. C appealed to the people of Bengal to send those men only to the legislature, who had already adopted or were prepared to adopt the creed of 'Sacrifice and Service in this country's interest, in doing so, it drew the particular attention of the Congressmen to the problems of Bengal which required immediate relief The Congressmen in the legislatures would take early steps to relieve the appalling dispersion the provinces were caused by floods, famines, diseases, poverty and unemployment For this purpose, they would draw up a scheme of what was called planned economy for the elimination of exploitation of people, for proper survey and utilisation of country's resources, for the strengthening the nation, for using man power and opening out new avenues of employment for younger generation [31]

The manifesto also showed some awareness that the Congress had become alienated from the peasants the bulk of whom were either Muslims or the Depressed Classes. The manifesto included revision of system of land tenure in the interest of the peasants and reduction of indebtedness of the cultivators [32]

By 1936, the left wing forces, throughout India, had made sufficient headway inside the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Jaya Prakash Narain The Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934 In Bengal, revolutionaries, left wing Congressmen, workers, peasants and students and youth were among left wing under the Congress Party in 1936 M N Roy and other leaders were already a force in the Bengal politics to reckon with, and such trends were bound to give a new and deeper orientation to the Bengal Congress politics in general and to the election campaign in particular [33]

In April 1936, Praja Samity elected A K Fazl ul-Huq its new president After that Praja Samity was renamed as Krishak Praja Party (K P P) The K P P declared its manifesto which soon came to be known as the '14 Points of the K P P Its main features were abolition of landlordism without

compensation, universal free compulsory primary education, full responsible self-Government for Bengal and release of all political prisoners [34]

The K P P election manifesto was not only non-communal, but it stood very close to the ideals of the B P C C In fact, the agrarian programme of K P P was more prone to the left of the B P C C and enjoyed the full support of the leaders of Kishan Sabha and Peasants Union Three major political parties entered in the electoral area in Bengal in 1937 – The Congress The Krishak Praja Party and The Muslim League [35] The electoral programmes of the B P C C. and K P P were substantially similar and there was an unwritten understanding between them The Congress in Bengal did not set up any candidate in the 119 Muslim seats They supported K P P candidates On the other hand, K P P did not contest a single general seat The result of the elections of the Bengal Legislature were quite interesting In a House of 250, the Congress had won 60 seats – 43 general and a few Depressed Class and labour seats The Muslim league had won 40 seats, the K P P 35 seats, Independent Muslims 41 seats, Independent Scheduled Caste group 23 seats and non party Caste Hindus 14 seats, the European had 25 seats, and the remaining 4 went to Anglo-Indians [36]

Results of 1937's Bengal Legislature : Total Seats – 250

	Parties		*Seats own*
1	Congress	–	60
2	Independent Muslim	–	41
3	Muslim League	–	40
4	K P P	–	35
5	Independent Depressed Classes	–	23
6	Non Party Caste Hindus	–	14
7	Europeans	–	25
8	Anglo Indians	–	04

The Independent Muslims soon started opting for parties Nearly half of them joined the Muslim League and the strength of the Muslim League rose to Sixty (60) and K P P strength also

rose to 58 The K P P leaders were invited to form a ministry with the Congress support[37]

LIST OF THE SCHEDULED CASTE LEGISLATORS WHO WERE ELECTED IN THE 1937'S ELECTION FOR BENGAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

	Name	*Party*	*Constituency*
1	Sri Radha Mohan Mandal	Independent	Burdwan North
2	*Devendra Das	do	B rbhum
3	*Krishna Kr Mandol	Congress	Midnapore
4	**Harendra Dolai*	*Independent*	*Jhargram*
5	*Hem Chandra Naskar	do	24 Pargana
6	*Lakhmi Narain Biswas	do	Nadia
7	*Kriti Bhushan Das	do	Murshidabad
8	*Rashik Lal Biswas	Congress	Jessore
9	*Pati Mohan Roy	do	Chulong
10	*Mukund Bihari Mullick	Independent	
11	*Tami Charan Pramanik	do	Maldah
12	**Prem Hari Burman*	*do*	*Dinajpur*
13	*S P Burman	do	
14	*Upendra Nath Burman	Independent	Jalpai Guri
15	*Prem Deo Raikat	do	
16	*Puspjit Burman	do	Rangpur
17	*N K Sinha	do	
18	*Mudhusudan Sirkar	do	Bagra cum Pabra
19	*Dhananjay Roy	do	Dacca East
20	**Amrit Lal Mandol*	do	Memen Singh West
21	*Mani Mohan Das	Independent	Menen Singh East
22	*Bharat Chandra Mondal	do	do
23	*Parmatma Thakur	do	Faridpur
24	*Upendra Nath Etbar	do	Bakarganj South East
25	**Jogendra Nath Mandol*	*Independent*	*Bakarganj* North East
26	*Jaglal Chandra Mandol	do	Tippara (Comila)
27	*Ashtosh Mullik		Bankura[38]

The Congress Working Committee met on February 27 28 and March 1, 1937 to review the election results The Working Committee congratulated the Indian people for their overwhelming vote of confidence in the congress and adopted a resolution on the Congress policy in the legislature The immediate

objective of the Congress in the legislature was to fight out the new constitution[39]

The committee adopted a resolution on Midnapore The committee congratulated the people of Midnapore district in Bengal who had shown their love of freedom and confidence in the Congress policy and organisation by electing the Congress candidate by overwhelming majority[40]

Krishna Kumar Mondal a scheduled caste leader and the Congress candidate for Midnapore constituency was declared elected in 1937 s Bengal Legislative assembly election[41] As soon as the election results were known efforts started to form a coalition Ministry in Bengal The K P P stood close to the Congress and the K. P P leaders – Syed Nausher Ali Maulavi Shamsuddin Ahmed Prof Humayun Kabir and others took the initiative in forming a ministry with the Congress support The *left winner inside the B P C C. favoured the agrarian policy of* the K P P and strongly supported the moval But the leader of the Congress legislative party in Bengal Sarat Chandra Bose took an entirely unhelpful stand Bengal missed a golden opportunity of rallying the Muslims to a fighting united front against *imperialism"*[42]

As soon as the talk brokedown the Muslim League stepped in and offered support for a K P P League coalition with Fazl ul Huq as the Prime Minister Mr Huq succeeded in forming a coalition Ministry with fragile majority consisting of K P P M L. As Independent Scheduled Caste MLAs some non-Congress Hindu M L As and Nilini Ranjan Sarkar who left the Congress and accepted a berth in the Ministry The League got four ministers inducted – Khwaja Nazimuddin H S Suhrawardy Nawab Khwaja Habibullah and Nawab Musaraf Hussain K P P got two ministers – A K Fazl ul Haq and Syed Nausher Ali Non Congress caste Hindus got three ministers – Nilini Ranjan *Sarkar Sris Chandra Nandy and B P Singha Roy, while the* Scheduled Caste got inducted two ministers – Prasanna Deb Raikot and Mukund Beharti Mullick.[43]

In August 1938 the militant wing of the K P P brought no confidence motion against Huq ministry The movers main contention was that the Huq ministry had broken all electoral pledges and was acting as a pro zamindar – reactionary – communal force. But perhaps the most biting speech on the non

confidence motion was delivered by the Scheduled Caste leader, Jogendra Nath Mondal[44] He declared "It is with a very mixed feeling that I am constrained to take part in the motion for non confidence in the cabinet with Hon'ble Mr Fazl-ul Huq at its helm He had aroused great hopes a I great expectations when he claimed himself as the champi n of the depressed and downtrodden peasants of Bengal But to day, I stand disillusioned He had treated his election promises like love pledges without the slightest intention of translating them into practice To our eternal shame and disgrace he has found his most congenial allies in the cream of Bengal aristocracy whose heads, he has only a few months back, demanded on the charger Today his last mask has fallen off and we found him in strange surroundings, amidst strange bedfellows The cabinet is a melody of interests, uniting only on the common ground of exploitation of the poor"[45]

But the Congress spoke in much more subdued tones in contrast to the angry and bitter tongued speakers from the K P P and the Scheduled Caste group This was perhaps a pre calculated policy Sarat Bose then the leader of the Congress thought in terms of a Congress backed coalition ministry, with K P P, Independent Scheduled Caste party and other nationalists as constituent unit and with Huq as a possible Prime Minister The Congress wanted that Huq would come out of the clutches of the Muslim League and European group[46]

After a long debate, when vote was taken, the no confidence motion was defeated Mr Huq had an extremely narrow escape of 111 votes caste in favour of the non confidence motion and 130 members voted against it The 111 member who supported the non-confidence motion were the Congress 53, K P P 18, Independent Praja Party 14 and Independent Scheduled Caste Party 15 and others[47]

The narrow escape from a defeat alarmed Fazl ul Huq He put pressure on the governor to quickly gave assent to the Tenancy Act Amendment Bill The new act gave certain important rights to the ryots Even the communist led Kisan Sabha admitted that the Act gave substantial relief and many rights to the ryots However, the Kisan Sabha rightly pointed out that the new Tenancy Act gave no rights to share-cropper and agricultural labourers[48]

"Even then, the amendment of the Tenancy Act, the Mahajani

Act and other pro ryot measures of the Huq ministry, however, valuable they might have been in years between 1938 and 1940, rallied the overwhelming minority of Muslims and Scheduled Caste peasantry *to its side*"[49]

Gandhiji, more than any other political leader of India, had realised that in order to present an invincible national demand before the British, it was necessary to forge the broadest united front of the down-trodden masses of India-unity of the Hindus including the Scheduled Castes, the Muslims and others[50]

1942'S QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT IN BENGAL

In Midnapore District, the Tamluk Subdivision was entirely disturbed during the Quit India Movement The best available account of a rebel national government comes from Tamluk *subdivision of Midnapore, the chroniclers being local Congress* leaders like Satis Samanta, the first Sarbadhinayak of the Tamluk Jatiya Sarkar The first clash in Tamluk subdivision occurred on 8th September when villagers on their own blocked export of rice by a mill owner at Dinapur, and then sought the help of nationalist volunteer On 29th September, a well-planned simultaneous attack was launched on communications and police station on Tamluk, Mahishadal, Sutahata and Nandigram as well as on Bhagbanpur in Contai, with massive crowd marching on *the thana Sutahata Thana was actually captured, but elsewhere* there was a blood bath with 44 being killed on a single day-including Matangini Hazara, a 73 years old poor peasant widow in Tamluk, who kept the national flag aloft even after being shot The Jatiya Sarkar was set up on 17th September, 1942 with subordinates later on in Sutahata, Nandigram, and Mahishadal The Jatiya Sarkar, which lasted till September 1944, controlled an armed vidyut Vahini, ran a hierarchy of arbitration courts which claimed to have settled 1681 cases[51]

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5

BEGINNING OF FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN ORISSA

Political consciousness gradually began to spread in Orissa, after the ideas and ideals of Keshav Chandra, Fakir Mohan Senapati, the Maharaja of Muyurbhanj, Mr M S Das and Madhusudan Rao and others. These leaders dedicated their lives to the cause of their country and proceeded a long way in their movement for social reform and political awakening

A wave of nationalism was now sweeping over the entire length and breadth of the mighty sub-continent National consciousness was slowly and steadily occupying the minds of the youth all over India In Orissa, Pt Gopabandhu Das dedicated his life to the service of his motherland, gave up his legal profession and devoted himself to educational experiments.[1]

In 1916, Pt Gopalbandhu Das attended the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress and, after returning from session he organised a District-Congress Committee at Puri Under his inspiring leadership a large number of Oriya youths responded to the national urge Many young students jumped into the struggle against British imperialism

The Rowlatt Act led to the Satyagraha movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi In 1921, the National Congress, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi started non-cooperation movement The whole of Orissa responded to Mahatma's call and the movement worked under the leadership of Pt Gopalbandhu Das. The response of masses of Orissa to the call for Non-cooperation was unique[2] Under the leadership of Gopalbandhu Das, salt Satyagraha proved a very effective movement in the coastal areas of Balasore, Cuttuck and Puri Districts In Balasore in particular, a considerable section of the local population was reported in April 1930 to be distinctly

sympathetic, partly no doubt through dislike of the statutory prohibition of the old Orissa industry of salt making" [3]

HARIJAN MOVEMENT IN ORISSA

In 1932, Gandhiji started the Harijan Movement, while he was in jail The Harijan Movement found a very warm response in Orissa In 1933 began the historic Harijan March of Gandhiji on foot in Orissa and he walked from Puri to Bhadrak 'preaching his gospel of love to the humanity, particularly to the untouchables' [4]

STATE PEOPLES MOVEMENT DHENKANAL, NILGIRI-NAYANAGAR

In Orissa, issues of forced labour, taxes on forest produce, extortion of gifts on festive occasions or tenancy rights inevitably were as much if not more important than demand for political reform The C S P leader Nabakrushna Chaudhari led a Satyagraha in Dhenkanal In December 1938, a powerful movement developed in Nilgiri, Nayagarh, Talcher and Ranpur There were numerous violent incidents with tribal fighting back with bows and arrows the armed power of the princes Thousands emigrated from Talcher to camp at Angul and Kosals in the Congress ruled Orissa On January 5, 1939, the British Political Agent in Ranpur, Major Barzelgette, was stoned to death after he had fired on a crowd in front of the royal palace 'Gandhi did his best to get the Orissan movements called off in return for some token political reforms in Dhenkanal and Talcher and the question became a bone of contention between the Orissa Gandhians' [5]

KRUSHAK SANGHAS MOVEMENT IN ORISSA

The Utkal P C C decided to setup 'Krushak Sanghas' throughout Orissa in September, 1931, and officials complained that the Congress village work was worsening Zamindar-tenant relation in district like Puri and other coastal districts.[6]

FROM 1935 TO 1940

In 1935, Orissa was the first province in India to send a majority of the Congress men as members of the Legislative

Assembly From 1937 to 1939 the Congress ministry in Orissa worked in every aspects In November 1940, Individual Civil disobedience Movement began to register the country's protest against the *participation of India in the world war II*

THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT IN ORISSA

In 1942, the Quit India Movement started in the month of August On 9th August, mass-scale arrest of the Congress leaders took place *In Orissa firing had to be taken recourse to on five* occasions killing more than a hundred people About three thousand persons were arrested In Dhenkanal the movement had greater success than elsewhere and there was established a *parallel govt in Nayagarh and Nilgiri There were mass risings* on the arrest of popular leaders [7]

In Balasore district of Orissa, the Congress organised plunder of salt depot, disruptions of communication and village Swaraj Panchayats were to hold on the food stocks, 35 persons were killed in mass attack on Eram and Bashdeopur police station on 28th September, 1942 A National Government functioned for some time in Gurpal region The official inquiry report on the Eram Bashdeopur firing alleged that the rumour was spread that 'Swaraj' would be attained within a week, under the 'Swaraj' no taxes would be paid and the paddy or the rice would be available to the poor Cuttuck was another storm-centre Here local terrorist organised 'Rakta Vahini' and the organisation soon became popular among masses Koraput, with its large tribal population witnessed a massive upsurge, including a real movement against the Jaypur Zamindar The invasion of reserved frost and attack on thana, the leadership came form illiterate villagers, one of whom was named Lakshman Naik, who was hanged on 16th November for allegedly murdering a forest guard [8]

TALCHAR AND PRAJA MANDAL AGITATION

In Talchar guerrilla activities continued till May, 1943 A Chasimaulia (peasant labour) Raj controlling nearly 400 square miles was founded which staged an attack on Talchar town on 7th September 1942, which could be curbed with the help of aeroplanen "The immediate cause of the popular upsurge in Talchar, which had already witnessed a massive struggle against

forced labour (bethi), forest law and autocratic rule in September 1938, was a rumour that Pobitra Mohan Pradhan, President of the State Praja Mandal, had been murdered"[9]

SOME SCHEDULED CASTE FREEDOM FIGHTERS FROM ORISSA

Chamru :- Chamru was born in the family of Sri Khadi Chamar at Sal village in Koraput district of Orissa He took part in the freedom movement in 1942 The police arrested him. He was severely beaten up in the police station which caused his death Thus he sacrificed his life for his country[10]

Nar Singh :- Nar singh was born in the family of Sri Damo (Scheduled Caste) at Talchar village in Koraput district in Orissa On 21st August, 1942, the freedom fighters attacked Matili police station He was leading them The police firing wounded him He was arrested by the police in a wounded condition A case was filed against him and he was sentenced to 3 months imprisonment He died in the jail[11]

Puniya Nayak Koharijan Brij Kishor Behra and Rupa Jena were the leaders from the Depressed Classes who fought Orissa Legislative Assembly election in 1937 They were elected on 28th January 1937[12]

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MAHATMA GANDHI AND FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN ASSAM

With Gandhiji's appearance on the political scene in 1917 and his successful experiment of Peasant Satyagraha in Champaran followed by Non Cooperation Movement in 1920, Assam politics was under going a rapid change

A delegation of the Assam Association pleaded before Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, on 6th December 1917, for the political advancement of Assam, on a par with the major provinces [1]

The political struggle started with an organised attempt for Hindu-Muslim Unity N C Bardaloi, T R Phookan and others called a Khilafat meeting at Gauhati on March 1920 By September 1920, many Assami Association leaders were participating in activities, preparatory to the Non Cooperation Movement Thus Assam was slowly drawn into the orbit of the new action oriented all India political agitation Meanwhile, a delegation, representing the Assam Association and led by Bardaloi attended at Nagpur Congress [2]

The prominent Congressmen of Assam, thereafter attended the Bombay session of A I C C (July 1921) Invited by them to visit Assam, Gandhiji arrived at Gawhati on a ten days provincial tour In the meeting at Tezpur, Nawgong, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Lilchar and Sylhet, bonfire was burnt of the heaps of foreign clothes an dyarn Gandhiji s second Tezpur meeting on 22nd August was attended by many tea garden coolies who came from the Rangapara circle by a special train [3]

SYLHAT QUESTION

A delegation from the Surma Valley led by Abdul Karim a

member of the Bengal Legislative Council urged upon Montagu for constitutional advancement and transfer of Sylhat to Bengal. In December 1917, the Sylhet People's Association submitted a memorandum to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State for incorporation of their district into Bengal The question was also brought up in the Imperial Legislative Council early in 1918

The Calcutta Congress session of 1917 was attended by a thirteen member delegation from the Brahmputra valley, all representing the Assam Association and about forty delegates from the Surma Valley It was in this session that the Congress, for the first time, conceded the principle of linguistic provinces for purposes of its own organisation, first in Andhra, to begin with The old demand of the transfer of Sylhet to Bengal attained a new significance in this context.[4]

THE AWAKENING OF LABOURERS AND GRASS ROOTS

The Non-Cooperation Movement was progressing day by day in Assam, but the expert economy of Assam was caught into a deep crisis because of a slump in the tea industries and an unfavourable rate of exchange. There was a sharp fall in the labour earning and an increase in unemployment So, strikes were breaking out here against the planters [5]

In September 1920, the Surma Valley political conference had declared complete non-cooperation with European planters and Merchants

In Sylhet and Cachar, however, the tea garden workers became again restive, because of persistent economic hardships Their frequent contacts with the Congress encouraged them to come out in action in their own way against the common enemy

The plantation labour-force was a multi-lingual, heterogeneous society They were from Chhotanagpur, Bengal, up, Bihar and from Assam On February 3, 1921 a Hindi speaking emissary of the non-cooperation movement arrived at Srimangal in Assam and addressed meetings These meetings made a deep impression on labour which resulted in a prolonged strike in Lungla Tea Estate [6]

A sensational Khoreal shooting case took place during first half of the 1921 The case was that a European planter, who wanted to live with a coolie girl, and on being refused, shot her

father with a revolver and was acquitted by the lower court The *Calcutta High Court set aside the proceedings and ordered a* retrial However, the accused was again acquitted by the jury in a verdict of eight to one What was striking in this connection was that out of the nine jurors eight were Europeans [7] During the months of March to June, this case was given wide publicity It was an additional factor for the labour unrest in the Surma Valley[8] But the real cause was economic

The laboures demanded *wages at the rate of eight Annas* per coolies (Men), and six Annas for Reja (Women) in the meeting at Adampur in Dholai valley The Non-Cooperators held their meeting on the same day The meetings were reportedly attended largely by tea garden labour [9] Strike also broke out at Dholai Valley in the South Sylhet in first week of May Tea garden labour demanded a pay increase Meanwhile, however the historic labour exodus *from* Chargola *and* Longai Valley in Karimganj subdivision had started with the return of 750 men, women and children *from* Anipur *Tea Estate on May 3, 1921* They were demanding a wage increase which was denied They had lately heard of the name of Gandhiji and put their faith in myths concerning his powers of doing good to the oppressed They, themselves, also indulged in all sort of myth making and accepted Gandhiji as a Messiah or an Avatar Their suffering ultimately goaded them to follow Gandhi's path [10]

Thousands of labourer left their tea garden and trecked to the nearest railway station, shouting 'Gandhiji Maharaj Ki Jai , as they passed along the road They were *determined to quit* their jobs and had sold their cattle and other properties The Government tried to make the coolies return by persuasion and threat, but failed Adequate public funds were raised by the Congress to meet their transport fare The police atrocities and epidemic made them helpless and they *assembled at Chandpur* Chandpur also joined in the strike

The Railway *men of* Chandpur at Laksam junctions struck work on 29th May The local steamer workers also joined the strike *after four days* [11]

"The Chargola exodus, *though a well known historical* episode, awaits further analysis as a *social phenomenon* Generated by deep rooted economic malady, the unrest in

Chargola and Longai Valley groups of tea gardens first took form of a strike for an increase in wages" [12]

The exodus was an open revolt, a primitive rebel action against the legitimized conditions of serfdom It was the product of an interaction between the Gandhian impact on primitive minds and the incipient class militancy [13]

There were strikes in the months of April and May in the Dibrugarh and Panitola groups of tea gardens A large number of labourers of the last-mentioned garden, led by recruits from Ranchi District, looted several Marwari shops On the charge of rioting, about sixty labourers were jailed [14]

Darrang was the other seriously affected beside Sib Sagar The most serious out break was at Dhendai Tea Estate where the intervening S P was manhandled [15]

The Non-Cooperation Movement could not avoid an offensive directed agitation against European planter's domination in Assam The general attitude of the Congressmen towards plantation strikes in those days in best illustrated by the reminiscence of Padmanath Barthukar, a non cooperator He writes "A group of workers met me at night Aggrieved with the Bara Sahib, they wanted to stop work, and I was approached to show them the way On hearing this, my heart was almost frozen It was not ago that some sixty coolies were thrown in to the jails, because of strike in Suntak, T E of the same Assam com, any It turned out to be a terrible sort of development as a result of which all the white Sahibs and the entire supervisory staff, who had grayed their hairs on the garden service, managed somehow to flee from the garden alive That is why it was but natural that the very mention of a strike would send a shiver down my body, and my mind was indeed filled with surfeit of repentance Why, at all, did I enter amidst the tea garden workers, without having considered the pros and conse ?"[16]

There was sufficient evidence, in both the valleys (Brahmputra and Surma), to suggest that the oppressed labour class was deeply impressed by nationalist movement and looked forward to the Congress for help in their cause [17]

The Assam peasantry also thought of raising the movement by refusing to pay land revenue rates in the ryotwari areas and chaukidari taxes in the Zamindari areas

Between 23rd December, 1921 and 8th May 1922, as many as three dozen select areas (Mauzas/Police Stations/Towns) in the plain districts were declared to be disturbed Inhabitants of these places were subjected to collective fines (about Rs 0 2 million in all) to pay for the deployment of additional police forces including nine and a half platoons of the Assam Rifles [18]

The Non-Cooperation Movement was nevertheless able to create a revolution in expectations by turning the Congress into a mass political platform. In Assam the movement was crowned with success at least in one respect It forced the alien Government to modify its opium policy Another by product of the movement was perhaps the immediate official action to expedite the reformation of local bodies. The Assam Municipal Act was passed in 1923 The Franchise related to the local boards was extended and was made identical with that of Assam Legislative Council [19]

The Twenty Sixth Session of the Indian National Congress was held at Pandu (Gauhati) in December 1926 It was a big event The all white Simon Commission arrived in Shillong on 2nd January, 1926 The Commission received all together twenty seven memorandum from various groups and organisations of Assam [20]

THE REPRESENTATION OF CHIRATAN MUCHI AND KALICHARAN MUCHI IN THE COUNCIL IN 1929

The call of the Lahore Congress (December, 1929) to fight for complete independence, set the whole country in motion The New Working Committee (A I C C) met on 2nd January 1930 and urged the electorate to bring pressure on legislators to resign from their respective legislature in response to the Lahore call Eleven Congress Swarajis from Assam Legislative Council and T R Phookan from the Indian Legislative Assembly resigned Some of them comeback through by election

Chiratan Muchi and Kalicharan Muchi, two scheduled caste members were elected with connivance of the Congress Their candidature was sponsored by Bhadralok politician The council met without the congress Swarajists on 10th March, 1930, to discuss the budget This was the first time in Assam history that two members of scheduled castes were elected to the council [21] The people pledged to prepare themselves for civil disobedience

and non-payment of taxes by severing gradually all voluntary association with British Gandhiji's Dandi March was the signal for country-wide civil disobedience Gandhiji was arrested on 5th May, 1930 After the arrest of Gandhiji Assam became restive, schools, colleges and shops were closed for several days

The Simon Commission Report in June 1930 was universally condemned The first R T C Conference met without the Congress participation The Civil Disobedience Movement was going on B R Medhi, the A.P C C President along with several other leaders was arrested in the month of August Altogether 671 participants in the Civil Disobedience Movements were arrested The A P C C meeting, held at Sibsagar on 22nd November, 1930, expressed its gratitude to the people of Assam for their wonderful response to the present India wide movement As per terms of the Gandhi – Irwin pact signed on March 5, 1931, all civil disobedience prisoners were released [22]

The National Congress took part in the second R T C in December 1931, but it ended in a failure

COMMUNAL AWARD AND DEPRESSED CLASSES

The communal award was based on the theory that India has not a nation, but a heterogeneity of unintegrated communities The Award made the Hindus immediately apprehensive of British Motivation in driving a wedge between the Depressed Classes and other Hindus Gandhiji s protest as fast unto death forced the leaders of the two section to reach an agreement with seats reserved for the Depressed Classes [23]

PEASANT AND MASS MOVEMENT

The economic depression of the thirties was widespread and civil disobedience movement tended to grow into an anti-imperialist mass revolt The eleven point-charter of demands that Gandhiji had raised in the 1930s included the demand for a 50% reduction in land revenue rate [24]

A number of Assame peasant's organisations were started during this period These organisations at the grass roots level, were not necessarily politically oriented The Hitasadhini Sabha, the Cachar Zila Krishak Sanmilans and Ryot Sabhas were the chief organisations The All Assam Ryot Sabha was formed in 1933

THE MINISTRY-MAKING AND REPRESENTATION OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES LEADERS IN MINISTRY

The Congress took part in the 1937 polls Out of twenty-nine, twenty-six candidates of the Brahmputra Valley came out successful[25] Being the largest single party in the 108 member Assam Legislative Assembly, the Congress had fair chance of forming a coalition ministry, but had no such inclination initially "The refusal to accept ministry and forming a solid block of Opposition', Wrote Gopi Nath Bardolia to Rajendra Prasad on 24 February 1937, 'will, to my mind, be more workable policy "[26]

In March 1937, the Congress Working Committee (A I C C) permitted the formation of the Congress ministries in those provinces where the party commanded a clear majority and the concerned Governors assured that their special power would in no case be exercized But no ministry could be formed in the Congress majority province in absence of any such assurance The Viceroy issued a message on 21st June, 1937 to get out of this constitutional crisis The message emphasized that the new constitution meant a real transfer of power This made the Congress Working Committee feel that the substance of their demand had been conceded On 7th July 1937, the Congress formed ministries in seven states[27]

In Assam, the non-Congress coalition ministry was formed on 1st, April 1937 Sir Mohammad Saadulla led the ministry as the chief minister But ministry could not survive and on February 4, 1938, Sir Saadulla resigned and formed a new ministry with Abdul Matin Choudhary, and Munawar Ali both of the Muslim League and R K Choudhary, Nichols Roy and Akshay Kumar Das Akshay Kumar Das was a scheduled caste leader A Scheduled Caste respectable member Roi Saheb Sonadhar Senapati complimented Saadulla Saheb in the upper house for giving a start to the scheduled castes politics in the province For it was Saadulla who had prompted their deputation to give evidence before the Simon Commission "The sight of a Scheduled Caste minister in the cabinet", said Senapati 'has made me feel that I have begun to enter the fold of the Caste Hindu [28]

But Saadulla ministry was not performing well The No confidence motion was rejected by only one vote 50 to 49 in

February 1938 Outside the Assembly too the situation was fast turning against Saadulla There was widespread unrest among coolie, labourer of tea garden, and work men in the wild fields The 1938 local board elections were turning into a political battle The Congress had secured 65% of the vote caste for contested general seats.

An opportunity to overthrow Saadulla led Government came again in 1938, September On 12th September, four Non-confidence motions were moved l nately Saadulla informed the house that he had submitted h resignation to Governor[29]

FIRST BARDOLOI MINISTRY AND REPRESENTATION OF SCHEDULED CASTE LEADERS IN THE MINISTRY

The new ministry was formed on 19th September, 1938 It was a Congress led coalition ministry The Five ministers who took their oath in September 1938 were G N Bardoloi as the chief minister, Ram Nath Das, a Scheduled Caste leader as a cabinet minister, Akshay Kumar Das, a scheduled caste leader, who was also was in the cabinet of Saadulla, was the third minister, both Akshay Kumar Das and Ram Nath Das belonged to Brahmputra Valley Fourth minister was Kamini Kumar Sen and Fifth was Rup Nath Brahma a tribal league leader After some time, gradually three Muslim ministers were taken Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Ali Hyder Khan and Mahmud Ali to complete the ministry by 20th October 1938[30]

AKSHAY KUMAR DAS was a Depressed Classes leader who belonged to Brahmputra Valley He was also a minister under Saadulla ministry from 5 February 1938 to 20, September 1938 Again he took oath in Bardoloi ministry The Bardoloi ministry took office on 20th September 1938 and resigned the office on 17th November Again he took oath in Saadulla ministry and continued from 11 February 1946 to 14 August 1947[31]

RAM NATH DAS

Ram Nath Das was a Depressed Classes leader and he was elected from Brahmputra Valley He was a cabinet minister in the Congress led Bardoloi ministry from 20 September 1938 to 17 November 1939 Again he remained minister from 11 February 1946 to 14 August 1947 The ministry was again led by G N Bardoloi[32]

In the ministry, Bardoloi was particularly the lone Congress man with a pre-election commitment In the eyes of Governor, Chief Minister Bardoloi was "a devout Gandhian, honest, obstinate, not very intelligent and with small gift of leadership" Wavell, the viceroy, found in him in 1946 "A more forcible and quicker intelligence than Khan Sahib, but not very pleasant personality"[33]

The chief minister was committed to a programme "of easing the burden of taxation on the poor and of providing means for the uplift and betterment of the masses"[34] The ministry led by Bardoloi, resigned on 27th February 1940, being goaded by the Congress High Command

PLANTATION LABOUR UNREST AND MUNICIPAL WORKERS STRIKES 1939-40

The plantation labour union were on strike in Sylhet and in five other tea gardens in Cachar The Sylhet – Cachar Cha Mazdoor Sangathak Committee was formed in 1938 The committee was renamed Sylhet Cachar Cha Bagan Mazdoor union, and was registered under the trade union Act on 27th April 1939 A wave of strikes broke out in Cachar, the most significant of them was the strike in the Arungabad T E in 1939 It continued for forty days It took place in the Allenpur T E of Cachar[35]

Another notable strike look place in Allenpur T E of Cachar on 30th July, 1940 when about 200 working women there spontaneously went on strike demanding higher wages and a decrease in work load By 3rd August, entire labour force of the garden struck work at the instance of the union In 1940, the Surma Valley Coke Mazdoor union was active in organising the Khalasis at Chhatak and Fenchuganj steamer station in Sylhet Some of the communists were also working in the Bangalore Assam Rail road workers' union The Shillong motor worker's union was registered on 6th may 1939 There was the Sylhet Scavenger's union, struggling in 1940 Its secretary was Kripal Nath Das in 1940[36]

THE PHASE OF LABOUR STRUGGLES

The labour struggles during the year 1937-40 were directed

against the British capital and it had a clear anti-imperialist character, and mostly they were left nationalist oriented

These strikes inspired not only the anti-imperialist students of both the valley but also the people at the cool heights of Shillong The Shillong Municipal worker's union was formed and registered on 10th August 1939

PLANTATION STRIKES IN ASSAM DURING 1937-41

Year	*No of strikes*	*No of workers involved*
1937	10	3 700
1938	7	3 700
1939	37	*Not available*
1940	17	Not available
1941	7	*Not available*[37]

At the initiative of Kriti Bhushan Choudhary, the Municipal worker's strike was widely sympathised by the local students So students and youth were deeply impressed by the working class awakening against the exploitation of the British[38]

THE PEASANT UNREST

In Assam peasants were also raising their demands against land lords An organised Kishan Movement raised its head in the Sunamganj Sadar, and Karimganj subdivisions of Sylhet The number of Kisan Sabhas in Sylhet went on increasing during 1937-40 While the landlord-tenant conflict dominated peasant agitations in Sylhet, it was the conflict between the state and the peasantry as a whole that moved the peasant masses of the Brahamputra Valley

Nilkhil Golpara Krishak Samiti Golaghat Krishak Sabha, Ryot Sabha, Golpara district Praja conference were chief peasant organisations of those days

The peasant agitation was organised in some places of the Brahmaputra Valley by the under ground communist leaders The Assam peasant and labour party was formed and its meeting was held at Gauhati on 2nd May, 1940[39]

ASSAM IN 1942'S STRUGGLE

The Quit India Movement of 1942 had its own effect in Assam. Processions and protect hartals were organised by people in many places of the province According to the Chief Secretary of Assam, Nawgong and Darrang were more troublesome than other districts in Assam. There was an atmosphere of rebellion around Nawgong, and from all accounts, also in the area around Kamrup and Jamunamukh.[40] People were shot dead by the police and military at several places of Nawgang district in Assam.

There were brutal police firing at Gohpur and Dhekiajuli, both in the district of Darrang. Thirteen persons were killed at Dhekiajuli and two persons at Gohpur There were also cases of police firing at Patacharkunchi of Barpeta subdivision on 25th September, 1942 and at Fakiragram in Goalpara subdivision in October Nidhanu Rajbansi, a poor Scheduled Caste peasant, was brutally murdered for resisting the imposition of a collective fine.[41]

Official Statistics of the Congress Disturbance Assam (9 August, 1942 to 31 December, 1934)

Nature of Case	*No*
Police firing occasions	4
Fatal casualties	15
Non Fatal casualties (Inflicted)	19
Non-fatal casualties (Suffered)	17
Police Station Destroyed/Damaged	4
Government building Destroyed/Damaged	64
Other Public Building Destroyed/Damaged	66
Private Building Destroyed/Damaged	61
Bomb Explosion Destroyed/Damaged	10
Explosives Discovered without Damage	9
Cases of Sabotage of Roads	43
Arrests Made	2 707
Case of Imposition of Collective fine	1
Defection from Government Service	Nil
Estimated loss to the Government	Rs 2 84,582
Estimated loss to other parties	Rs 1 94 847
Collective fine imposed	Rs 3,39 487

Source Home Pol, File No 3/52/43 (NAI) cited by Bhuyan – 28 appendix Table I

LAST PHASE

THE REVOLT OF NANKARS

The Nankars were landless peasants settled on the rent free land in lieu of obligatory personal service to their Zamindars The men folk were body guards, obliged to take up lathi in *defence of their master against rebellious tenants The women* folk had to perform domestic service in their master's house and they were often used also as concubines, under the law they had no right on the land and any time they could be evicted from the land

The storm centre of the movement was Laluta Bahadurpur, where a prolonged class war was carried on between the Zamindar and the Nankars, involving classes and casualties on both sides This abominable system was more deep rooted among *the Muslim Zamindars than among their Hindu counterpart Also,* a majority of several thousand Nankars were Muslims Led by Kisan Sabhas, they refused to serve their master any longer and defended their lands against the landlord's private armies Thus, in Sylhet, the C P I was able to build up a united platform of Hindu and Muslim peasants in certain pockets of their influence against all provocations Having red Flags in hands, Muslim Nankars were even seen campaigning against Pakistan at the time of the Sylhet referendum in July 1947 [42]

SECOND BARDOLOI MINISTRY AND REPRESENTATION OF RAM NATH DAS AS SCHEDULED CASTE LEADER

After the labour party's victory in England, the new Prime Minister, C R Atlee announced that a Cabinet Mission would go to India by March end in 1945 to help India to frame their own constitution The provincial election had crucial importance for both the Congress and the league

After the election victory by the Congress the second Bardoloi *ministry was formed The second Bardoloi Cabinet (1946-50) had* altogether seven members to begin with three from each valley and Rev Nichols Roy from Shillong, B R Medhi was made finance minister, B K Das was given Home ministry, Debeswar Sharma was elected the speaker, Abdul Rashid, a Muslim member,

Bhimdhar Deuri, a tribe and Ram Nath Das was taken as a Scheduled Caste leader and was inducted in the ministry

The ministry started functioning on 11th February, 1946 and lasted till independence on 15th August 1947[43]

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CONCLUSION

The beginning of the freedom movement in India had an impact on the British rule It resulted in socio-religious movements, peasants' revolts, tribal uprisings as well as civilian rebellions which aroused discontent among the masses and signified a struggle for liberation from the imperial rule On the other hand, the uniform administration, English education and modern means of communication united India and its people into a nation Foreign events, such as the rise of Japan, the Russian revolution, kindled a new hope in the hearts of Indians

Consciousness among the Depressed Classes arose in late 19th century with the establishment of the Satya Sodhak Samaj, Arya Samaj and the self respect movement Removal of untouchability was the slogan of Mahatma Jotiba Phule, a Lower Class social revolutionary In South India societies for the depressed classes were established during the first two decades of the twentieth century Depressed Classes wanted a separate identity and social justice in Indian politics. They regarded themselves detached from the Caste Hindus who had been exploiting them for one thousand years After the Round Table Conference the communal award was announced Mahatma Gandhi and Caste Hindus opposed it on the ground that the Depressed Classes were a heterogeneous lot The other reason was that the Congress could not be successful in making a demand for it, being the sole representative of India without the support of the masses

Mahatma Gandhi started Harijan tour in 1933 after the Poona Pact He travelled 12,500 miles on foot from November 1933 to August 1934 This tour was aimed at ensuring temple entry removal of untouchability and other kinds of social reforms. Like so many Gandhian programmes the Harijan movement was ambiguous It did not solve the problem Gandhiji confined the Harijan campaign to limited social reforms like opening of wells roads and temples He delinked Harijans from any economic demand, although,

Harijans were mostly landless labourers. He once advised caution against inter-dining and inter marriage as he supported the Varna system and never attacked the caste feudalism

The problem with Depressed Classes was not only social it was more economic than social Dr Ambedkar was in favour of abolition of the caste system which could never have become possible without a new economic structure In the opinion of Dr Sumit Sarkar 'From a more long term point of view Harijan welfare work by Gandhians must have indirectly helped to spread the message of nationalism down to the lowest and most oppressed section of rural society and Harijans in most part of the country did come to develop a traditional loyalty towards the Congress" [1]

In Bihar the same level of consciousness was not noticed like that *in Maharastra and South India before 1917 The system* of untouchability was at its worst Mahatma Gandhi himself narrated the situation when he reached Patna for the first time with Raj Kumar Shukla *Feudal character and caste hatred were more* deep-rooted in Bihar in comparison to other provinces although Bihar produced three national leaders who belonged to the Depressed Classes Jagjivan Ram Jaglal Choudhary and Bhola Paswan Shastri were true Gandhian leaders who contributed a lot to the nationalist movement in Bihar

In Bengal the situation was somehow different but it was not much better Namsudras were uniting against the upper caste feudals. Sometimes depressed classes made a common cause with Muslim peasants because the low ranking peasantry of Bengal belonged to Muslim and Depressed Classes. So their economic demands were the same Hiteshranjan Sanyal s study shows that the Congress was able to draw a considerable support from grass-roots in West Bengal villages Jogendra Nath Mondal and M B Mullick were Depressed Class leaders They had mass support but their role was not beneficial for the people

Orissa s 'Praja Mandal agitation and 'Rakta – Vahini agitations were popular among the masses. Lakshman Nayak was an illiterate leader who was hanged by the British Government. In Assam, tea garden labourers were resisting European planters. Their demand was not political it was economic. But slowly the Gandhians attracted them to fight for the nation along with the peasantry Yet Bardoloi and other Congress leaders were planters. The leftists did more useful work among labourers. Akshay Kumar Das and Ram

Nath Das were both Scheduled Caste leaders but they were not very influential in Assam.

The contributions of the masses and the depressed classes was considerable in the freedom struggle It can be said that the Indian freedom movement was not only the movement of the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi, nor was it a movement of only extremists, it was the upsurge of people whose resistance was more remarkable

In 1942, when Gandhiji initiated the Quit India Movement', all individuals became their own leaders and sacrificed their lives at the altar of their motherland So the freedom movement was not for mere political independence, it was a struggle for economic justice and social emancipation Thus, this was a three pronged struggle The country has been able to achieve only political freedom so far, but the socio-economic battle is going on

The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian political scene since 1920 was mainly responsible for the uplift of the Depressed Classes in India He aroused the Hindu conscience against the evil of untouchability The three prominent leaders of Bihar among the Depressed Classes - Sri Jaglal Choudhary, Sri Jagjivan Ram and Sri Bhola Paswan Shastri were creations of the Gandhian ideals and were fully inspired by Gandhi Ji

The second important factor for the uplift of the Depressed Classes was the dominant personality and achievements of Dr B R Ambedkar He inspired the educated youth among the depressed by his example and precept

The last, but not the least was the spread of modern education among the Depressed So most of the Depressed class leaders were educated and they therefore, played a significant role in the freedom struggle It is proved beyond doubt that most of the Depressed Class leaders made immense sacrifices for the freedom of the country and were in the Vanquard of the freedom struggle Some of them like Jagjivan Ram, Bhola Paswan and Jaglal Choudhary became prominent nation-builders and administrators in independent India

Thus the Depressed Classes did not lag behind either in the freedom struggle or in the reconstruction of Modern India after independence

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APPENDIX-1

LIST OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN BIHAR

1 Bantar
2 Bauri
3 Bhokta
4 Bhuniya
5 Bhumij (excluding North & South Chotanagpur and Santhal – Pargana Division)
6 Chamar
7 Mochi
8 Chaupal
9 Dabgar
10 Dhobi
11 Dom
12 Dhangad
13 Dusadh
14 Dhari
15 Dharhi
16 Ghansi
17 Halalkhor
18 Hari, Mehtar, Bhangi
19 Kanjar
20 Kuraniar
21 Lal Begi
22 Mushar
23 Nat
24 Pan
25 Swansi
26 Pasi
27 Rajwar
28 Turi

APPENDIX-2

LIST OF SCHEDULED CASTE OF BENGAL. (PRINCIPAL DEPRESSED/CLASSES 1931

1 Bagdi
2 Bauri
3 Muchi
4 Dom
5 Mal
6 Hari
7 Lohar
8 Sunri
9 Pod (Poundra Kihatrya)
10 Kaora
11 Rajbangshi
12 Khaira
13 Namsudra
14 Chamar, Muchi

APPENDIX-3

PRINCIPAL SCHEDULED CASTE IN ASSAM

1 Bhansphor
2 Bhuinmali, Mali

3 Briltiag, Bania, Bania
4 Dhupi, Dhobi
5 Dugla, Dholi
6 Hira
7 Jallkeot
8 Jhalo, Malo, Jhalo-Malo
9 Kaibratta, Jaliya
10 Lalbegi
11 Mahara, Bhangi
12 Muchi, Rishi
13 Nam Sudra
14 Patni
15 Sutradhar

APPENDIX-4

LIST OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN ORISSA

Adi Andhara
Amant
Andhelia
Badaik
Bagheti
Baghati
Bajikar
Ban
Banki
Basor
Burad
Bauri
Bauti
Bavin
Bedia
Bejia
Beldar
Bhata
Bhoi
Chachati
Chamar
Mochi
Muchi
Chandal
Chandai Mary
Cherua-Chhelia
Dandsi
Dewar
Dhanwar
Dhobo
Dubhi
Dom-
Dombo-
Duria
Dom-
Dushadh
Jaggali

Pan
Khadal
Hari
and others-(93)